

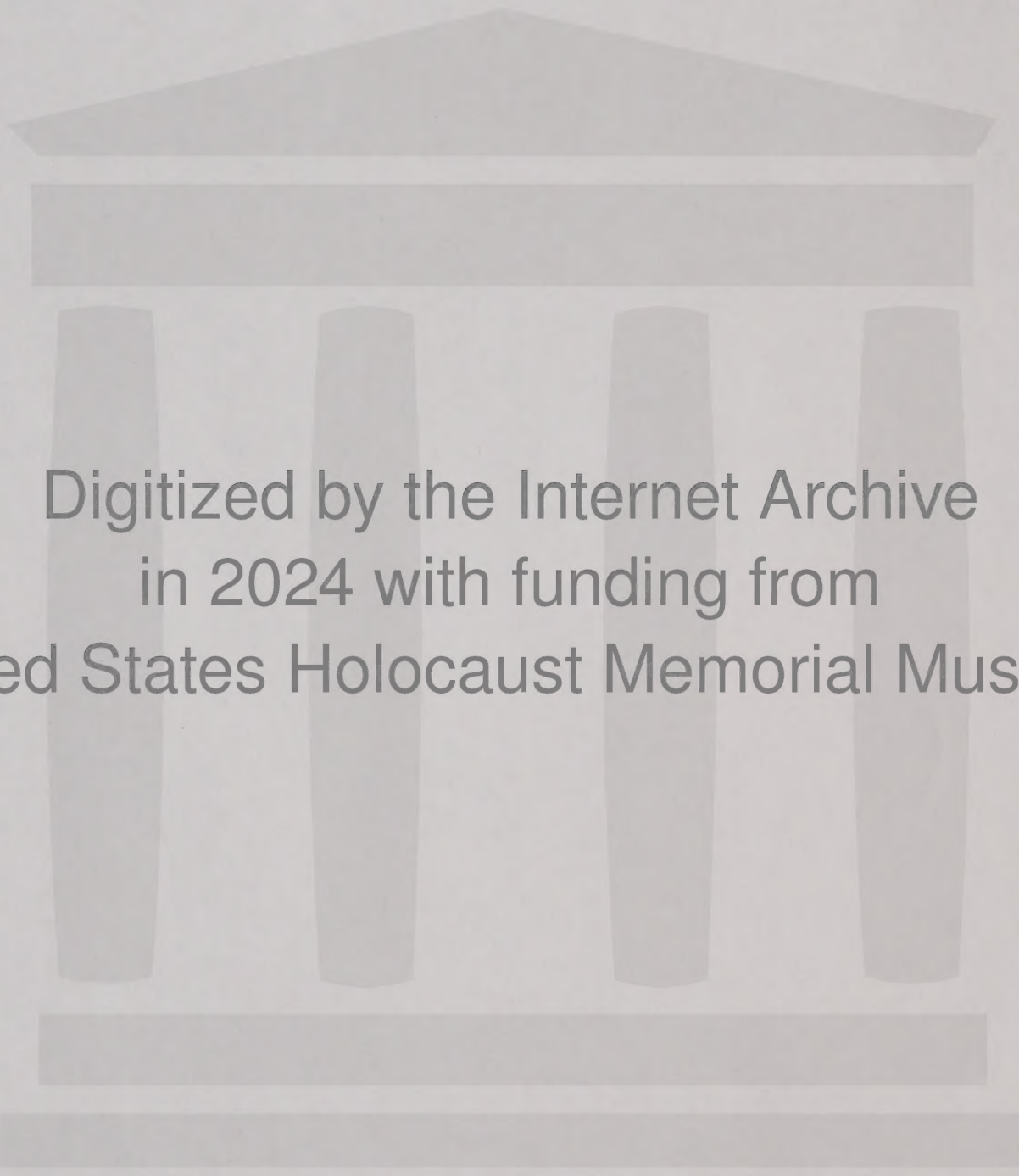


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Against Germany

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February 14, 2001

Holocaust Survivors' Memoirs Project
World Jewish Congress
501 Madison Avenue
New York, NY 10022

Gentlemen,

Enclosed is my manuscript titled "The Long Way Back."
Since it is the sequel to my published book "Berlin N-54,"
I am also enclosing a copy of this one for reference.

The manuscript, consisting of 208 pages, contains
original documents and pictures. It has been formatted
for a 6" X 9" book and was written with Apple Works 6.
The font is Adobe Garamont size 12. The sub-notes are in
size 10.

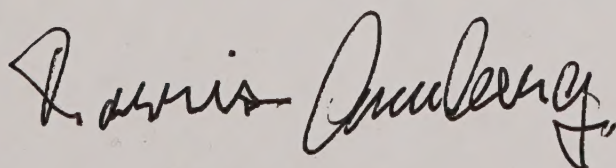
I have copied the manuscript also to a zip disk. If
requested, I will send it to you.

I hope you will find my post-war odyssey through central
and eastern Europe interesting, and that it will be
published. My story recounts, among many other
episodes, my imprisonment by the Soviets in the very
same prison in Budapest, as Raoul Wallenberg, life on
the road, in refugee camps, my work as a detective in
post-war Berlin, as well as my life in America.

Thanks for your consideration and good luck with your
worthwhile project.

Sincerely,

5

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Morris Gruenberg". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the typed name and the page number.

By the author of *"Berlin N-54"*

The Long Way Back

A Post-World War II Odyssey

Morris Gruenberg

By the author of *Little World*

The Long Way Back

A Post-World War II Odyssey

Morgan Caspary

This book is dedicated to all children.
May their lives be free of hate and discrimination,
and protected from the dangerous follies of their elders.

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Please do not write on this page.
and protect from the dangers of fire.

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Prologue

The following include excerpts from the last chapter of the book
"Berlin N-54."

After evading the evacuation of the labor camp I was in, I was still in the Austrian Burgenland village of Parndorf, near Bruck and der Leitha, when several tanks and their crews arrived, who were part of an armored SS unit that moved into the nearby Southeast Wall area with the intent to stop the advancing Soviet army.

When Soviet forces reached our area a few days later and engaged the dug-in SS troops and their Panzers in a fierce battle, I remained in the house of the Horvath family, while they went to the safety of a shelter at the outskirts of the village.

As I sat on the floor, huddled into a corner of the room, where I listened to the thunderous noises outside and tried to calm my nerves with one of my last cigarettes, an artillery shell exploded nearby that shook our walls. When I peered through the shattered window, I saw that it had struck the neighbor's house whose roof was now on fire.

When my attempts to put out the fire by carrying pails of water up a ladder proved to be futile, I decided to notify the owner of the house, who was in the same shelter with the Horvaths. That proved to be equally futile, however. After a dash through the deserted village, during which I was attacked by machine gun fire from a low flying Soviet airplane, the sullen man, who seemed to be in shock and just stared at me with blank eyes, shook his head and refused to leave.

I had barely returned to the house and settled into my previous position, amidst the steadily increasing tumultuous noises of exploding artillery shells and rapid machine gun fire, when I suddenly heard the distant, but clearly audible German command, "*zurückziehen*," withdraw.

Taking this as the long awaited signal that my liberation was at hand, I quickly tore up my passport and several other documents I had, and burned them in the stove.

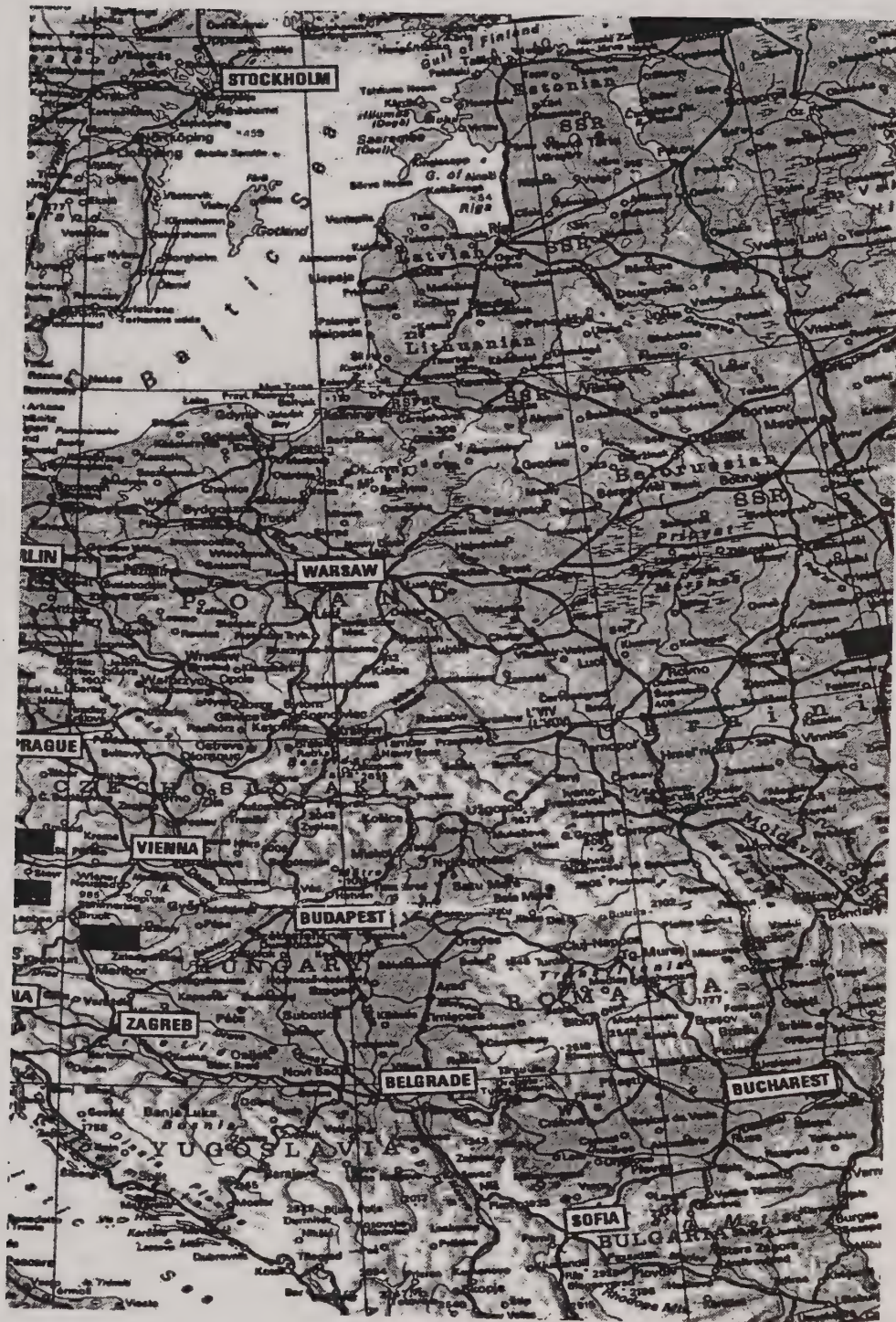
Having come this far and been able to stay alive, I didn't want to take any chances, as the Soviets might shoot me on the spot or send me to one of their dreaded Gulags in Siberia when they discovered that my identity in my passport, in which I was listed as a Catholic Ukrainian, was a spurious one, and that I was neither that, nor spoke its language.

Worse than that were the two documents I had from the SS Kommandants of two German concentration camps in Poland. They certified that the person, whose pseudonym I had taken on had, in fact, been an SS guard in both of these camps. While these documents had been of great help to me during my clandestine existence as a Christian, and had saved my life, they would surely result in my execution if they fell in the hands of the Soviets.

After a short period of relative silence, followed by sounds of Russian voices and rapidly approaching boot steps, a Soviet soldier suddenly burst through the door of the room I was in. When he pointed his automatic rifle at me and demanded to know who I was, I quickly answered in Russian, "*Yevrey*," a Jew, while I raised my hands and smiled at him, before I added, "*Nemetzky Yevrey*," a German Jew.

For a few tense and suspenseful moments, during which I could barely contain myself and held my breath, the Soviet soldier just stared at me before he slowly lowered his weapon, returned my smile with a broad grin and came over to embraced me, on this, the second day of April, 1945, on which I was finally liberated from the twelve year long reign of terror by the Nazis.

Except for the use of pseudonyms for persons whose names I can regretfully no longer recall and those whose privacy needs to be protected, the following is a true story.



A map of Central and Eastern Europe.

Chapter 1

The Soviets

Parndorf, Austria, April 2, 1945...

Following the first Soviet soldier who liberated me from the Nazi reign of terror, was a succession of others who briefly stopped by for a quick drink or a few cigarette puffs, before they continued their pursuit of the retreating Germans. While they were friendly when they learned that I was Jewish and shared some of their cigarettes with me, it was a different matter with a contingent of soldiers who arrived thereafter and remained in the village.

My first inkling of trouble came when the latter, after liberating me also from my wrist watch, inquired where the women are. When I told them that several Russian *djevushkas*, girls, worked for farmers nearby, the soldiers showed no interest in that information. Instead, they wanted to know where the local women were. Remembering the grizzly stories of killings, looting and rapes by Soviet soldiers, spread by the fleeing population from the East and the Nazi German media, which I had previously dismissed as propaganda and refused to believe, I became suspicious and told them that I didn't know.

After darkness fell over the area, which they used as a cover, the Horvaths left the safety of the shelter in the village and came back to their house. They were accompanied by their neighbor's family whose home had been destroyed by fire. Frightened by the roving mobs of drunken Soviet soldiers they had eluded on the way, they settled on the floor of the dark unlit room, where they hoped to remain undiscovered until the worst was over. But that was an unrealistic notion, as the rampaging soldiers who combed the village in search for women, alcohol and valuables, were going from house to house and it was only a question of time until they would

also come to ours.

When we soon heard several loud knocks on the door, everyone in our room was terrified and nobody dared to open it. But when the banging on the door continued and I went to see who it was, it turned out to be several Soviet officers who wanted to requisition a part of the house for themselves and their staff. While that should have been fortunate and a protection for us, it wasn't. At least not at first, as they occupied only one side of the farm house, while we were in the other. However, since I spoke some Russian, I thought I might be able to remedy that situation and went to see the officers after they had settled in their quarters.

"Who are you?" questioned the officer in charge when I knocked on their door and got his permission to enter the room, where he and his comrades were sitting around the table.

"A German Jew," I replied.

"What are you doing here?" asked the visibly surprised officer.

When I briefly explained that I had been hiding in the village of Parndorf after its labor camp was evacuated and he asked what I wanted, I said, "I am staying in the room next door with the family of the house and some neighbors. They are all very decent people and have been very helpful to me. Since they are very frightened and fear for their wives and daughter's safety, I have come to ask for your help to protect them from harm."

"Who is going to harm them?" asked the officer while he stared intently at me.

I was now in a quandary, as it would be dangerous for me to imply that soldiers of the glorious Red Army might also be looters and rapists. With that in mind, I replied, "Probably no one. They are terribly scared, however, because of the stories the Nazis had spread about supposed atrocities committed by your soldiers against civilians, which are surely not true," I hastily added.

After nodding his agreement to the latter, the officer asked, "Have any of them been members of the Nazi party?"

"No, definitely not," I assured him, "They are just simple, hard working farmers."

That, and my concern for them, must have made a favorable impression on the Soviet officer. After a short pause, during which he fixed his gaze on me and smiled, the officer said, "Go back to these people and tell them not to be afraid of us. We are not Barbarians. I will put a sentry in front of their door and see to it that

no one will be harmed."

I was elated. Not only had I been able to converse in the Russian language, of which I possessed a limited vocabulary, but I had also accomplished what I came for. When I transmitted the Soviet officer's words to the worried Horvaths and their neighbors, who were visibly relieved to hear that they would be safe, they thanked me for interceding in their behalf and began to look to me as their protector.

Unaware of my true identity, which I hadn't revealed to them, they may have assumed that I had a favored status with the Soviets because of my supposed Ukrainian nationality. But that was not the case, as it was just an alias I had taken on during the Hitler years to save my life. Nor was the fact that I was Jewish of lasting benefit, as I would soon learn to mine and their dismay. But meanwhile, being as safe as we could be under the circumstances, and no longer in need to hide in the dark, we lit a small kerosene lamp and shared some food provided by the Horvaths.

While we sat there, we heard tumultuous noises outside. Most of these were bone chilling shrieks of terror and desperate cries for help that pierced the relative stillness of the night, emitted by local women who were attempting to flee from the pursuing hordes of drunken Soviet soldiers.

When one of these voices sounded to me like that from Ilena, a local girl I have had a brief affair with, and I mentioned it to Anna Horvath who sat next to me, she said that I was mistaken. But when the cries of the desperate women neared our house and I heard that distinct voice again, which was now somewhat hoarse but sounded again like that of Ilena's, I became alarmed.

"Where are you going?" asked the concerned Anna when I rose from the chair.

"I am going outside to see if it is Ilena and bring her here," I answered.

"Don't do it, Ivan," warned the concerned Anna in a stern voice, while she shook her head and grabbed my arm. "They will kill you if you go outside."

Her calmly spoken words had a sobering effect on me and may, in fact, have saved my life, as it would have been a suicidal attempt to rescue anyone from the marauding hordes of the inebriated and out-of-control Soviet soldiers. When they also came to our house and demanded access to the women inside, they were turned away.

But only after prolonged and heated exchanges of threats and arguments with the sentry at our door and confrontation with the officers who intervened in our behalf.

As the night wore on and the terrifying noises outside slowly subsided, we turned the light off and settled down on the floor to catch some sleep. That came very quickly to me after the long, eventful and very exhausting day I had gone through.

I don't know whether I slept minutes or hours, but awoke instantly, as did everybody else in our room, when I suddenly heard loud Russian voices, accompanied by repeated banging on our door. At first I didn't know what to make of it as that was not supposed to happen. But when the clamor increased to a point that I feared they might break the door down, I quickly went to the adjoining wing of the house occupied by the Soviet officers and their staff, who, as I discovered, were no longer there. Also gone was the sentry at our door. Thus stripped of our protection, and with everyone in the room terrified when they learned of it, there was little I could do but open the door and try to persuade the soldiers to leave.

That turned into an impossible task, however. When I asked the soldiers what they wanted and they insisted that I first open the door, and I did so, I was roughly pushed aside before I could say anything. Only after I followed them into the room where the terrified Horvaths and their neighbors were, was I able to approach one of the soldiers, who, besides being a sergeant, also seemed to be the leader of the horde.

"Who are you?" snapped the sergeant when I addressed him in Russian.

"A Jew," I answered, hoping that it might get me on good terms with him. Having made no visible impression on him, the sergeant asked, "What do you want?"

"I just want to point out that these are all very decent people and ask that you don't harm them," I replied.

"*Yop tvoyu matj*" (a frequently used Russian expletive that refers obscenely to one's mother), shouted the incensed sergeant while he raised his automatic rifle and pointed it at me. "Lie down at once," he commanded. When I did, he pressed the nozzle of his rifle against my temple and hissed, "Don't move. If you do, or say another word, I will kill you."

Shocked by his unexpected hostile reaction and apparent resolve to carry out his threat, I remained in the prone position, as also did

Anton Horvath and his neighbor through most of the night and soon ensuing horrors.

After they searched us for watches and other valuables, and the house for alcohol, which they drank in any form, whether medicinal or Aue de Cologne, the soldiers took the females to an adjacent room where they were subjected to brutal rapes.

No one was spared. Not the neighbors ten and twelve year old girls, their mother and old grandmother, nor Maria, the sick and feeble-minded spinster and older sister of Anna Horvath. A similar faith also befell the other females who were dragged out of the room by the drunken Soviet soldiers and repeatedly raped. The terrified and distraught women pleaded with the soldiers to spare them, or at least give them a respite, but it was of no avail.

When the neighbors oldest daughter slumped on the floor next to me, who was about seventeen years old and had offered herself several times to the soldiers instead of her younger sisters and mother, in order to save them, she cried and moaned in pain, while she lamented, "Oh God, for this I have saved myself?"

Trapped in this dreadful situation, it was very frustrating for me. I could neither help them, nor myself, as the sergeant, who had threatened to kill me, remained in our room throughout the ordeal. Besides guarding us, he also assumed the role of assigning the women to the newly arriving Soviet soldiers who must have heard about our place and kept on coming.

Unaware of the terrible atrocities committed by the German aggressors against the Soviet people, I didn't expect its soldiers, my liberators, to behave in such brutal manner and was appalled by their actions and profoundly shocked. Particularly so since the Horvaths and their neighbors were decent and compassionate people who had opened their homes and given aid to me and to other forced foreign laborers in the camp of Parndorf.

When I could no longer bear the desperate cries for help and the wailing of the abused women around me, not even with my eyes closed and my head buried in my arms, I raised my hand to get the attention of the sergeant nearby.

"What do you want?" snapped the sergeant while he pointed his rifle at me.

"I need to go to the toilet," I said.

"Where is the toilet?" questioned the sergeant.

"Outside," I replied.

"Go," he commanded.

After I passed the line of soldiers that had formed outside the door, who were awaiting their turn to be let in, I quickly slipped into the outhouse where I pondered what to do, as I had no intentions to return to the scene of horror inside the house. While I could have left under the cover of darkness and search for another shelter, I ruled that out, as I might be shot by marauding Soviet soldiers before I could identify myself.

Hard pressed to find another solution, I found it eventually when I remembered the attic barn above the Horvaths living quarters where they also kept their chickens. I kept peering through the narrow gaps between the boards of the wood framed outhouse until the line of soldiers became somewhat shorter. Then I went outside, quickly slipped behind them and, aided by the cloudy, dark and moonless night, climbed up the ladder to the overhead barn without arousing their attention.

With the thick insulating piles of straw muffling the desperate cries of the women and other disturbing noises from the outside, and mentally exhausted from the ordeal I had gone through, I quickly fell asleep and remained there for the rest of the night.

* * *

When I awoke with the cry of the rooster, the dawn of a new day was about to replace the black shadows of a horrible night. Unlike the previous night's clamor, it was eerily quiet and deserted when I swiftly descended the ladder. I had barely touched the ground when a Soviet soldier, who suddenly came out of the house, rushed toward me, raised his automatic rifle and shouted, "*Rucky wjerch*," a command I quickly followed by raising my hands.

When I replied to his inquiry about my identity, "*Yevrey*," a Jew, which would become an often repeated identification, his face contorted into a hateful mask while he hissed, "*Zid, yop tvoyu matj. Pashly.*"

Having used the word "*Zid*," for Jew, in a hateful and demeaning manner, which I didn't expect to hear from a Soviet soldier, I was stunned and appalled by his reaction. While nudging me on with his rifle in my back and with threats and obscene curses along the way, the soldier marched me off to a nearby house where a burly Soviet captain and members of his staff were busily studying a map spread before them on a table. After he waited for his turn to be

heard, the soldier made his report about me and left.

When I told him that I was Jewish, the captain, who looked quizzically at me asked, "What are you doing here in this village?"

"I was a prisoner in the labor camp here in Parndorf," I replied.

"What did you do there?" inquired the captain.

"I worked out in the field digging trenches and felling trees," I answered.

"How is it that you are still here?" questioned the captain.

"I hid in one of the houses when they evacuated the camp," I explained.

"Do you have any identifications?" asked the captain.

"No, I don't." I replied. "The Nazis took it away from me."

When the captain turned to a couple of girls sitting nearby, I hadn't noticed before, and asked them if they knew me, I became alarmed. Having worn a white arm band in the camp marked with the commandant's stamps while I worked in its kitchen and bread store, which I disposed of as soon as the Germans retreated, I feared that the girls might erroneously identify me as being one of the Nazis or a collaborator. Although neither was the case, it would have been difficult for me to prove at this time and might lead to disaster from which I might not be able to extricate myself.

For a few tense moments, during which the atmosphere in the room was laden with electricity, my fate hung in the balance. After staring at me inquisitively, the Russian girls, who had apparently not been in the labor camp but rather worked as farmers helpers in Parndorf, exchanged a few words with each other, shook their heads and told the captain that they hadn't seen me before.

With an inaudible sigh of relief, I thanked Fortune for coming to my aid again, as it had often done in the recent past. When the captain said that I could leave and I hesitated, he asked, "What are you waiting for?"

"I want to go with you," I answered.

"With us?" asked the surprised captain. "What for?"

"Give me a gun. I want to fight with you against the Germans," I replied.

"Did you hear that?" said the captain, while he laughed and turned to his staff, "he wants to fight the Germans."

Disappointed about his apparent negative reaction, I was about to repeat my request and try to convince him of my determination, when an artillery shell exploded nearby and shook the walls of our

room. When the captain yelled, "Get out of here," and I did, I suddenly realized the perilous situation I was in.

Having burned my false identity papers, I would probably be summarily shot if I was caught without them by counter-attacking SS forces. Faced with this dilemma, I decided to retreat further behind the front lines toward the Hungarian border. That was easier planned than done, however, as the soles of my wooden shoes had cracked during my frantic rush through the village, while I tried to dodge the machine gun fire of a strafing Soviet airplane, and were now very difficult to walk in.

While the thought of returning to the Horvath's house occurred to me, I decided against it. Besides fearing the marauding Soviet soldiers who were still roaming through the village, I also felt ashamed for what they had done to these people and embarrassed by my inability to help them. Particularly so, since I had previously argued on behalf of the Soviets and tried to assure the Horvaths and other natives that the grizzly tales about their atrocities were only propaganda and totally unfounded.

As I hobbled with my broken shoes along the road towards the outskirts of Parndorf, a miracle occurred that seemed like "manna from heaven." Strewn among some crushed and empty boxes and other debris was a pair of long riding boots. I could hardly believe my luck when I inspected them and realized that they were not only brand-new and made of fine calf's leather, but also my size. Only when I tried to slip them on did I realize why others before me had passed them by, as both were left boots. Although uncomfortable on my right foot, but better than what I had, I quickly replaced my pair of broken wooden shoes with the two left leather boots and got on my way.

I kept walking along the highway that ran from Vienna to the Hungarian border, until I came to a destroyed section of the road. When I circumvented the scattered bomb craters by making a detour through an adjacent field, and noticed several Soviet tanks inside anti-tank-traps, I found the answer to my puzzlement, how the Soviet forces were able to pass through the fortified German "Southeast Wall" in just one single day, which had taken nearly six months and thousands of forced laborers to build. They had, in fact, ingeniously overcome the anti-tank-traps by placing some of their own tanks inside the deep trenches, removed the turrets and ran the others across.

My amusement about their cleverness soon faded, however, when I came upon a grizzly battle scene with scattered bodies of fallen soldiers. Some of the corpses were in grotesque positions with their hands up and fingers bent like claws, frozen in motion by rigor mortis, as if they were groping for something in the sky to hold onto in their death throes. Since the dead were all Soviets, I surmised that the Germans must have taken their casualties along when they retreated.

While I passed through the area strewn with corpses, I suddenly spotted a small package on the ground. Although curious about its contents, I hesitated to inspect it as it was right next to a dead Soviet soldier whose partially shattered head and face was splattered with pieces of his skull and brain. Having never been on a battlefield, nor faced such a horrible scene, I hesitated until the nagging hunger pains overcame my nausea and I picked up the package, which contained a few stale, but still edible biscuits.

I continued my trek across the fields, until I noticed a group of soldiers at a far distance. Having spread-out-wide and slowly moving in my direction, they were also waving to me. Taking their gesticulations as a friendly welcoming gesture, I continued to walk toward them and with increased tempo when I realized that the Soviet soldiers were, in fact, all females, an oddity I had not encountered before. But when I came closer and noticed that the implements in their hands resembled those of vacuum cleaners, I instantly froze in my tracks. Although I lacked experience with weapons of war, I had seen enough German news-reels to recognize that these strange looking implements were land mine detectors.

Terrified to make another step, I froze in my fixed position until the female mine-sweepers came and rescued me from my predicament. While staring at me wide-eyed as if I had miraculously walked on water, they also confirmed that I had indeed passed through a densely mined field.

Chapter 2

By the time I got back to the main road, its flow of traffic had substantially increased with civilian refugees of varying nationalities, Hungarian and Yugoslavian soldiers, as well as with Soviet transports, traveling in both directions. Besides being littered with destroyed military vehicles and other damaged war material, there were also some discarded possessions from refugees that may have become too burdensome for them to carry. When Soviet soldiers tossed bundles of bank notes from a passing troop carrier, which turned out to be Pengös, the Hungarian currency, I picked up a hand full of these notes and stuffed them in my pocket.

I kept on walking until darkness fell over the area and the pain in my right foot became too acute to go on. While my initial exuberance about my pair of new boots had faded by this time, I was still glad to have them. When Soviet soldiers wanted to take them from me, they refrained from doing so when they discovered, to their chagrin, that both were of the left kind. Thus, in spite of the pain and intermittent stoppage, it was still preferable to walk with the pair of left boots than being barefoot.

Being inadequately dressed in my thin gray coveralls, I took occasional shelter in abandoned houses along the way during stormy weather and spent the cold nights in barns and other shelters, as also did many other refugees.

After being without food for two days, except for the biscuits I had found next to the dead soldier, I was greeted by the growling of my empty stomach when I woke up. When I approached a group of Soviet soldiers who were having their meal while they bivouacked around a small fire in a nearby field, and asked whether they could spare some food, they aimed their rifles at me and told me to leave.

Disappointed and with increasing hunger, I continued on my way until I came upon a wagon and its Soviet driver. Having left the seemingly endless supply lines of single horse-drawn covered

wagons, that stretched as far as I could see and moved in both directions, he had stopped to inspect one of the wheels. After having been chased away by the other Soviet soldiers, I approached him very slowly and stopped a short distance away, so that he would not perceive it as a threat, and waited until the soldier looked up and asked, "What do you want?"

"I am hungry," I replied. "Can you give me some bread?"

"Who are you?" inquired the soldier, while he stared suspiciously at me.

"A Jew," I answered.

"A Jew?" repeated the visibly surprised soldier while he slowly rose from his crouched position and asked, "from where?"

"From Germany," I replied.

With our short conversation having been in Russian, I was elated when the Soviet soldier suddenly smiled, stretched out his hand and said, "*Shalom alechem*," peace be with you. When I returned his traditional Hebrew greeting and he asked whether I spoke Yiddish, I quickly confirmed by saying, "*Ich red oich mamme looshen*," I also speak our mother's tongue. That, as I soon realized during our ensuing conversation, was somewhat exaggerated.

Although I understood Yiddish, as it had indeed been my mother's tongue, neither I, nor my Jewish friends of similar East European backgrounds in Berlin ever spoke more than a few words of that jargon. That notwithstanding, and by substituting occasional German words, which was appropriate, as Yiddish is almost entirely derived from that language, I was able to converse with my Jewish brethren and became increasingly more fluent as we went on.

When the soldier learned that I was headed in the same direction as he was, he said I could join him, but cautioned me to stay hidden inside his covered wagon, as it was strictly forbidden for him to pick up any passengers. Happy to get a ride, I quickly climbed onto the wagon and hungrily ate the bread, onions and bacon my brethren shared with me, who, as I learned, was not from Russia, but rather a Polish Jew.

Having lived in the Polish area that was annexed by the Soviets in September of 1939, he fled across the border to the Soviet Union when the Germans launched their attack against it. Since the Soviets eyed their Polish neighbors, whether Jewish or not, with much suspicion, he was not received with open arms by them. Instead, the Soviet authorities sent him to work in the distant coal mines of

Tashkent, where he and other Jewish refugees labored under harsh and inhospitable conditions. But when the Germans began to annihilate whole Soviet armies and their human resources became scarcer, they drafted him and others, formerly deemed untrustworthy, into the army, which in his case was to serve in a transport unit.

Assigned to shuttle back and forth in his horse-drawn wagon with supplies for the front lines, the Jewish soldier was on his way back to pick up fresh supplies from a nearby depot when I met him. Since he faced severe punishment for picking up a passenger, I got off the wagon before we approached his destination.

With my hunger temporarily stilled and several miles covered, without having to walk in my pain inducing pair of left boots, I went on with renewed spirits and vigor toward my new destination. That came about when the Jewish soldier inquired, "Where are you going?"

"I don't know," I answered. "I just want to go far enough to be out of reach of the Germans."

"Why don't you go to Budapest?" he suggested. "You could get help there from the Jewish community."

"How far is Budapest?" I asked.

"About one hundred miles," replied the soldier. "Just stay on this road, it will lead you to it."

Following his advice, I kept on walking in that direction and stopped overnight in deserted houses along the way, or, when such cover was not available, slept in the open field. Since my foraging in these places rarely produced anything more than a few uncooked beans or some grain, I was hungry again and in need of food when I arrived at the Austro-Hungarian border, marked "Hegyeshalom-Magyarovar" by a partially damaged sign on the road.

When I passed through the first Hungarian village and followed the tantalizing aroma of freshly baked bread, it led me to a small house with an unmarked shop, where I spotted several loaves on its shelves. Although I doubted whether the Hungarian money I had picked up on the road still had any value, or that they would sell bread to me without ration coupons, I decided to take my chances and entered the shop.

To my surprise and elation my doubts proved unfounded. The middle-aged female proprietor, who greeted me in Hungarian but also spoke some German, not only gave me a loaf of bread in

exchange for my Pengös, but also added a piece of home-made cheese as well.

Provided with sustenance again and with renewed energy, I continued my trek through Hungarian territory until I was stopped by one of the Soviet military controls on the road near the city of Györ. Unlike the previous ones who let me pass when I told them that I was a Jewish refugee, these soldiers asked no questions. Nor were they interested in my identity when I volunteered that information. Instead, I was herded with a group of other men toward a damaged bridge nearby where they put us to work.

What according to our guards was supposed to be just a few hours of repair work on the bridge, after which we would be set free, lasted instead the entire day. When the guards told us that we would remain there over-night and continue our work on the next morning, I used an opportune moment and the cover of darkness to escape through the nearby shrubbery.

* * *

Wary of Soviet controls and making detours whenever I spotted one ahead on the road, I continued on my way until I arrived at nightfall in the city of Komarom (now called Komárno and located in Slovakia), which was about half-way to Budapest. With the pain in my right foot being so severe that I couldn't go on, I searched for a shelter where I could settle down for the night. I thought to have found one when I noticed a railroad station ahead. Besides being a good place to rest, I thought it might also be an opportunity to hop on a train toward Budapest.

As I walked along the tracks toward the station, a dark shadowy figure suddenly emerged between several stationary railway cars and shouted something to me in Hungarian. Unable to understand Hungarian, I didn't reply and just kept on walking. But when the man, clad in a long leather coat, quickly caught up with me, and asked in German who I was, and I replied, "*Ein deutscher Jude*," a German Jew, he pointed a pistol at me and took me to a nearby police station where I was locked into a prison cell.

That is where I languished for several days without getting a shred of food from the exceedingly hostile Hungarian jail keepers. Neither did the other two inmates with whom I shared the cell.

While one was Hungarian who spoke no other languages besides his own, the other, who claimed to be Yugoslavian, spoke a dialectic

but quite adequate German. That led me to believe that he might be an ethnic German. Besides being able to communicate with him, I also traded my boots he so keenly wanted, even though he was aware that both were for the left foot, for his old but still intact pair of sandals.

When I was picked up by two Soviet soldiers on the fourth day, they took me to a nearby prison camp and shoved me into a bunker. Unable to see anything in the unlit bunker, except for some shadowy outlines of persons around me, I was startled when a voice next to me suddenly asked in an accent-free German, "*Wo kommst Du her, Kamerad?*" where are you from, comrade?

At first I didn't know how to reply, as I had no idea who that person was and just remained quiet. But when he repeated his question and my eyes began to adjust to the darkness in the bunker, that was faintly illuminated by a few rays of light from a single small window with iron bars, I realized, to my horror, that all the men around me wore German uniforms.

While some were those of the regular German army, the *Wehrmacht*, others, including that of the inquisitive soldier next to me were that of the dreaded *Waffen SS*, the military arm of the SS organization, my fiercest enemies. Trying to play it as safe as possible, I replied, "*Ich bin ein Volksdeutscher*," I am an ethnic German.

"Oh yes?" queried my neighbor. "From where?"

"From the Carpathian area," I said, hoping that he would be unfamiliar with this mountain range that stretches across several East European countries, which turned out to be so.

When he inquired about its location and I gave him a general geographic description of the area, his curiosity about my background quickly waned. He did, however, startle me again when he asked, after a few moments of silence, "Do you have a watch?"

Thinking that he wanted to know what time it was, I replied, "I am not sure, but I think it's about nine or ten o'clock in the morning."

"I am not asking for the time," said the SS soldier. "What I want to know is whether you have a watch?"

"A watch? No I don't," I answered. "The Russian soldiers took it from me."

"Oh, that's too bad," said the SS soldier.

"Why is that?" I inquired.

"You could have bribed your way out of here. The Russian guards are crazy about watches. They have let several of our comrades go in exchange for them," he confided in a hushed tone of voice.

"Really?" I questioned. "They let them go for a watch?"

"Yes," confirmed the SS soldier with a chuckle. "However, since they have to account for the number of prisoners here, they just grab a few men on the road and bring them here to make up for it."

The appalling fact that bribed Russian sentries let SS men go free and arrested others on the road some of whom were survivors of concentration camps, was confirmed also by other refugees I later talked with.

Though able to avert the immediate danger, it did not remove the threat to my life, as the murderous SS men would surely kill me if they suspected or somehow discovered that I was a Jew. Being desperate to extricate myself from this predicament I couldn't do so as long as I was in their midst and had to wait until an opportunity presented itself.

That came about when, due to the lack of latrines and other sanitary facilities, small groups of prisoners were taken instead to an open field by the Soviet guards. There I was finally able to strike up a conversation with one of them and inform him of the danger I faced from the Nazi soldiers.

Having spoken to him in Russian must have made an impression on the soldier, as he did not return me to the bunker, but rather took me to his commanding officer. When I told him that I was a Jew and explained my situation, the officer ordered that I should be taken to another bunker where I was locked up with a number of Soviet prisoners-of-war, a few deserters and criminals. Although a motley group of rough-and-tough-looking characters, I felt much safer among them and no longer feared for my life.

* * *

My sense of security was short-lived, however, when I was taken from the bunker on the very next day and turned over to four Soviet soldiers with whom I boarded a truck. At first I didn't give it much thought that I was their only prisoner. But when they placed me in the very center of the open troop carrier, while the soldiers with automatic rifles in their hands occupied the four corner seats,

ostensibly to prevent a possible escape attempt, it struck me as being comical.

Who did they think I was? A Nazi bigwig or some other dangerous war criminal? Being neither, and confident that this obvious mistake would soon be recognized by the Soviet authorities, I was not yet alarmed about my situation and settled on the floor while the truck went on its way.

When I addressed the guards in Russian, who were surprised that I had some knowledge of their language, their hostile postures began to change. They gave me a piece of dark bread and some bacon when they learned that I hadn't had any food for several days, which I quickly devoured. They also shared one of their strange looking cigarettes with me, called "*machorka*."

Consisting of a crudely-cut tobacco, similar to that used in pipes, rolled into cone-shaped newspaper and sealed with saliva, the combination of the strong tobacco, coarse paper and ink produced a pungent and harsh tasting smoke that almost took my breath away. My thought that *machorka* was just a poor substitute for non-available cigarettes proved erroneous. When I offered them some regular cigarette paper I still had, the soldiers just laughed. They declined to accept it and continued to use newspaper instead.

Although I had been able to establish a somewhat better rapport with the Soviet soldiers, they still viewed me with suspicion and did not respond when I inquired about our destination. They did, however, reveal some information about the war, which was that the Red Army was now in hot pursuit of the retreating Germans along the entire eastern front. They also quoted from a Soviet military publication, that the Nazis in their desperation were now using poison gas against them, which, as I later learned, was not factual.

Our sporadic conversations continued until we arrived in Hungary's capital city, Budapest, where we eventually stopped and entered a large building located near a railway terminal.

After I was briefly questioned about my identity by a Soviet officer, situated at a desk in the foyer, he turned me over to two guards. They took me down to, what I would later call "The Dungeons," located in the lowest sub-level of the building, and locked me into a cell.

When the iron cell door opened and I was taken several flights upstairs, the guards shoved me into an office, where I came face-to-face with an officer of the GRU, the Soviet military counter

intelligence, whose operations, although similar, was independent from that of the NKVD, the forerunner of the KGB.

Chapter 3

Seated behind a singular desk was a young man, dressed in a well-fitting military uniform, with a clean-shaven face and short-cropped blond hair, whose age I estimated to be in his mid-thirties. After he motioned that I be seated on a plain wooden chair, situated in the very center of the room, the officer spoke with one of the guards, who left and returned with an elderly man clad in tattered civilian clothing, who was to be our interpreter.

That turned soon into a problem for me. When the GRU officer, whose name was Capitan Petrov, began his interrogation, I realized that the Hungarian interpreter's scant knowledge of the Russian language exceeded that of his almost nonexistent and very heavily accented German. When he persistently ignored my request to correct his wrong translations and assumed a hostile posture instead, I became alarmed about it.

To avoid possible dire consequences, I finally said to the captain in Russian, "*Eto nye pravda, Capitan. Vashy Perevotchik nye gavarit i nye ponimayet Nemetzky.*" That is not correct, Captain. Your interpreter neither speaks nor understands German.

Visibly startled by my ability to speak Russian, Captain Petrov stared at me for a few moments before he inquired about the wrong translations. When I restated them correctly in Russian, he quickly dismissed the inept Hungarian translator and said, "We will continue without an interpreter."

"But that is impossible," I protested. "I speak very little Russian and certainly not enough to understand and answer all your questions."

"Don't worry," said Captain Petrov. "Let me know when you don't understand. I will explain it to you."

And so he did, whenever necessary, with much patience and occasional use of hand gestures or graphics. That was not only because of necessity or Captain Petrov's benevolence, as I initially assumed, but also to turn the interrogation into a tedious and tiring

process for me, caused by my limited ability to converse in Russian. After he briefly questioned how and where I learned to speak Russian, and I explained that it had been from my mother and our Russian guests who had once patronized our small restaurant in Berlin, Captain Petrov said, "Let's start all over again. What is your family name?"

"Grünberg," I replied. "It has an umlaut in German, but can also be spelled Gruenberg."

When Captain Petrov asked that I write both versions for him, and I did, he said, "The latter will do." He then inquired, "What is your first name?"

Although I told him it was "Moritz," he never used that name but addressed me always as "Gruenberg" instead.

To Captain Petrov's question when and where I was born, I answered, "October 4, 1921, in Berlin, Germany." I did, however, hesitate when he inquired about my nationality, as I needed to think about it, until I arrived at the conclusion that it was Jewish, which I conveyed to him.

"So, you are a German Jew," concluded Captain Petrov, who wrote it on a long pad, as he did with all my answers, but stopped and erased it when I said, "No, I am not."

"You are not?" questioned Captain Petrov, "What are you then?"

"I am just Jewish," I replied.

"Yes, I know," acknowledged Captain Petrov, "But what is your citizenship?"

"Stateless," I answered.

"Stateless?" echoed Captain Petrov. "What were you before you became stateless?"

"I was born stateless," I said, and explained the circumstances and the fact that a person born in Germany assumes the citizenship of its parents rather than that of the country. And since my parents were stateless, so also was I.

Apparently familiar with such matters, my interrogator kept nodding while he made his notes. He then inquired about the address of my last residence in Berlin; that of the schools I went to; the extent of my education; what books I had read; the sports and political organizations I had belonged to; my work history, as well as a detailed description of my mother's and sister's backgrounds.

All that was a very time-consuming and tiring process, as the meticulous Captain Petrov, who asked for minute details, also

seemed to dot all -i's- and cross every -t- while he recorded it on his pad. When we stopped for a lunch break, I was taken back down to my cell where I ate my meager meal, consisting of a piece of bread and some soup. My respite from the lengthy interrogation was of short duration, as I was soon taken back upstairs to face Captain Petrov again.

* * *

Continuing where we had stopped, I gave Captain Petrov a detailed description about our life in Berlin. I also told him about my mother. How she fled from her home in Poland after one of the recurring Christian inspired bloody pogroms (riots) by anti-Semitic Poles and began to walk westward, until she arrived in Berlin. The year was 1905, and my mother was barely 15 years old.

After a failed marriage and loss of our shoe factory and most of our possessions during the German economic crash of 1923, my mother turned our home into a small family type restaurant, so that she could take care of her two children. My sister, Celia was six years old and I was two.

I also told Captain Petrov about the deprivations and terror during the Hitler years and how I met and befriended the Catholic Ukrainian, Ivan Bauga, whose identity I later assumed. How I was able to survive while I lived under this pseudonym in Austria, as well as in a forced labor camp in Parndorf, where I was eventually liberated by Soviet forces.

It was at that point that Captain Petrov, who had thus far listened attentively, very briefly and for the first time shed his dispassionate demeanor and exhibited some signs of emotions. He paused and gazed at me quizzically, before he resumed his usual bureaucratic pose again.

After lengthy interrogations that lasted well into the late evening, Captain Petrov told me to approach his desk and requested that I read and sign his hand written report. When I glanced at it and noticed that it was not only written in Russian, of which I had just a scant knowledge, but also in the totally unfamiliar Cyrillic alphabet, I told him I couldn't do so. That didn't faze Captain Petrov, however, who proceeded to read the entire report to me, while stopping intermittently to explain whatever I didn't understand.

The upshot was that it didn't matter whether I understood or

not, as I could not verify that Captain Petrov's report written in Cyrillic or his translation thereof was indeed correct. Having thus no choice but to trust him, I signed the report.

When I was taken back down to the dungeons and locked into my cell, I was so exhausted that I slumped on the cot and quickly fell asleep. No sooner had I done so when the door opened and the guard commanded that I get up. When I protested that I was very tired and needed some sleep, the guard, a Siberian with sharply protruding cheek bones and slitty eyes, who wore one of those odd looking peaked caps with ear flaps and a Soviet star, told me that it was forbidden.

Ostensibly following orders, he kept checking on me throughout the night from the peephole of the iron door and quickly entered the cell to prod me with his rifle whenever I tried to steel a few quick winks. Unable to sleep and awake all night in the brightly lit cell, whose light was never turned off, I was very tired when I faced Captain Petrov again on the next morning.

Though upset about their measure to prevent me from sleeping, I was as yet not concerned about my fate. I felt sure that I would be released once the Soviet police realized that I was indeed who I claimed to be, namely a Jewish refugee and survivor of the Nazi terror. I thought that it might, in fact, happen on this very morning when the very dapper looking Captain Petrov, who was impeccably dressed in his well-fitting and neatly pressed uniform, received me rather cheerfully with a friendly "*dobra utrom*," good morning.

That did not materialize, however, and my hope to be set free soon evaporated when Captain Petrov began the interrogation and I realized, to my bewilderment, that his questions, except for their sequence, were identical to those of the preceding day. When I mentioned to him that I had already answered all of these questions, Captain Petrov just waved it off by saying "*nitshevo*," never mind, and continued along the same course.

Thus he proceeded to inquire about mine and my family's history, and all other details of my past, over and over again. He never questioned the veracity of my answers, but just recorded them, meticulously, and word for word, on the same long pad he had previously used. Except for a lunch break which I spent again in my cell, and a few brief interruptions when other Soviet officers entered his office to confer with him, during which Captain Petrov told me to rise and remain standing, a protocol I would always have to

follow, the interrogation lasted again throughout the day and into the night.

When they took me back down to the dungeons, I spent the entire night in the brightly-lit cell without sleep again, as the very same Siberian guard, whose shift it was, prevented me from doing so. He did, however, contrary to his stoic demeanor and fearsome appearance, exhibit some compassion with my lot when he told me to approach the door and slipped a partially smoked *machorka* cigarette through its peep hole, which I gratefully accepted.

Except for some minor changes of its sequence, the interrogation on the third day was essentially a repetition of the two preceding ones. What differed, however, was my physical and mental condition, which had deteriorated by this time, due to the fact that I received only minimal rations of food and had been deprived of sleep for the past three nights. Thus weakened, perpetually hungry and barely able to keep my burning eyes open, I fell asleep whenever short interruptions occurred, from which I was promptly awakened by Captain Petrov.

* * *

The fourth day began with a surprise visit by a Jewish Soviet officer, who came to my cell with a Hebrew prayer book. He asked that I read several lines from a few randomly selected pages by him. While that would normally have been easy for me, as I had learned Hebrew in the Jewish school I attended and frequently used it while I sang in a synagogue choir, it proved to be very difficult in this case, as this prayer book, used by the East European Jews, lacked the familiar vowels. When I mentioned this to the Jewish officer, a short man of dark complexion with equally dark hair and eyes, he just shrugged it off and told me to proceed. Though haltingly and probably not always accurate, I managed to read most of the words therein.

After he verified that I had been circumcised as prescribed by Jewish law, the Jewish officer, who ignored my questions about my incarceration and pleas for help, left the cell, while I was taken upstairs to face Captain Petrov again.

My hopes that the inspection by the Jewish officer and his confirmation that I was Jewish would result in my freedom soon dissipated. While maintaining his dispassionate demeanor, Captain Petrov abruptly departed from his line of repetitive interrogation

and said, "Gruenberg, I have been very patient and listened to your story for the past three days, but it is time now for you to tell the truth."

Startled by the sudden confrontation and that my interrogator, for the very first time, questioned the veracity of my statements, it took a few moments until I could collect my thoughts and replied, "But I have done that all along, Captain Petrov."

"No, you haven't," countered the resolute Captain Petrov, while he fixed his gaze on me, "I am still waiting to hear the truth from you."

"But I have done so," I reiterated. "Whatever I have told you is absolutely true."

"Perhaps some of it is, but certainly not your ridiculous story about how you survived by living among the Nazis as a Ukrainian. What do you think we are? A bunch of idiots?" asked Captain Petrov in a decidedly less friendly tone of voice.

Now that I was finally able to reveal my true identity and talk about my clandestine existence without reservation or fear, I was stunned when I realized that Captain Petrov believed none of it.

As I pondered the irony of my situation, I also remembered what my alter identity, the real Ivan Bauga had prophesied when we last met in Vienna. When I told him how I had been able to obtain legal residence in Vienna and a passport, Ivan said, "Who will ever believe an incredible story like this?"

That was apparently the case also with the suspicious Captain Petrov, who said, when I asked why he didn't believe it, "Because the Nazis killed all German Jews. How is it that you are alive?"

When I attempted to reiterate how I survived by assuming a non-Jewish identity and was able to pass as such, Captain Petrov cut me off and said, "I don't want to hear any more of that. What I do want to know from you is, who you really are and whom you are working for?"

Still perplexed about the sudden turn of his interrogation and unaware what he was leading-up-to, I reaffirmed, "I am who I said I was and I don't work for anyone."

My puzzlement about what he alluded to was soon resolved when my interrogator, who fixed his eyes on mine, suddenly said, "You are a German spy. Aren't you?"

"But Captain Petrov," I protested, "Being a Jew and thus considered an enemy, I was hunted by the German Nazis and

targeted for extermination."

"That is no proof," countered the resolute Captain Petrov. We know that some Jews also worked for the Germans."

"Perhaps so," I replied, "but I am certainly not one of those."

"I don't believe you," said Captain Petrov, a statement he would repeat over and again to my chagrin and exasperation.

While ignoring my denials, Captain Petrov persisted in his assertion that I was a German spy. He continued the interrogation along these lines throughout the day, until it was interrupted when the door to his office suddenly opened and an officer appeared whom I hadn't seen before.

Although of huge size and towering over the slender Captain Petrov, I did not pay much attention to him. I just rose routinely from my chair, as I was required to do whenever a Soviet officer entered the office. The situation changed very quickly, however, when Major Savchenko, who turned out to be Captain Petrov's boss, remained in the office.

After Captain Petrov gave him a short resume about me, Major Savchenko turned toward me and asked, in a heavily accented and quite atrocious German, "*Du sprecken daitsch?*" do you speak German?

When I acknowledged that I did, the beaming Major Savchenko, who was visibly impressed with his linguistic success, continued his questioning in equally primitive German, "*Du Communist?*"

"*Nein, ich bin kein Communist,*" I replied negatively in German.

"*Aha, Du Fascist,*" deduced my new interrogator with a booming voice. Ostensibly unaware of other, less radical political views, he quickly came to that erroneous conclusion.

When I rejected his assertion and claimed to be a Democrat, and Major Savchenko retorted that only Communists were true Democrats, it struck me as being so comical that I could not suppress an audible chuckle, which I immediately regretted.

Having apparently used up the entire extent of his limited German vocabulary, Major Savchenko reverted to his native language while he launched into a tirade that included many Russian expletives, before he accused me of being a German spy and demanded that I confess. When I refused, he kicked me so hard with his boots that I fell off the chair and landed on the floor. After he vented his fury by delivering several kicks to my ribs, Major

Savchenko uttered a few more threats and left the office.

"Do you see what happens when you are stubborn and refuse to cooperate?" said the sympathetic sounding Captain Petrov, when I slowly got up and returned to the chair. "I can save you from further punishment, but only if you tell me whom you are working for and who your accomplices are."

When I reiterated that no such thing existed and voiced my protest about the brutal treatment, Captain Petrov, who just waved it off, said instead that his patience and my time was fast running out and urged that I should confess before I had another encounter with Major Savchenko.

"Think about it tonight and do it before it's too late," warned Captain Petrov, before he ended the long lasting interrogation for that day. His words were still on my mind when I was taken back down to the dungeons, where I was greeted by a surprise, as there was another prisoner in my cell.

Chapter 4

Having been imprisoned for nine days and in solitary confinement for the past four, I welcomed the opportunity to talk with someone who had just come from the outside. My hope that I might get some information about current events and the war from him was not forthcoming, however. At least not initially, as my cellmate, a clean-shaven and well-dressed middle-aged man, spoke only Hungarian, a language I was totally unfamiliar with.

Besides sounding entirely different than any other European language I had heard before, it also lacked the international words commonly shared by them. Of further impediment was that my co-prisoner, who seemed profoundly depressed about his lot, was ostensibly not in the mood to converse with me.

When he eventually began to respond to my efforts to communicate, and briefly did so via sign language and a few German words, I learned that he had been the publisher of a Hungarian newspaper in Budapest. But that was all I could glean from him, as my cellmate, who was subjected to similarly harsh treatments and deprivations as I, soon resumed his former sullen demeanor and became unresponsive again.

Though suffering from similar causes and near total exhaustion, including increasing numbness, perpetual hunger and so tired that I could barely keep my eyes open, my reaction differed from that of my cellmate.

My puzzlement about my interrogator's accusation that I was a Germany spy, had given way to a feeling of disappointment. Instead being dispirited and compliant, as my adversaries might have expected, I became increasingly incensed and defiant about the deprivation of sleep and insufficient nourishment, as well as the long interrogations and physical abuse inflicted by Major Savchenko.

That must have become evident also to Captain Petrov, as he changed his previous confrontational interrogative routine on the next day and conversed with me in an informal and friendly manner.

Proving to be well educated and intelligent, Captain Petrov discussed several authors and books we had read, music and famous composers we mutually liked, as well as some social matters and recent history. But most of all, he spoke in glowing terms about Soviet *Kultura*, culture, which, according to him, was superior to that of the decadent Capitalist countries. Since Soviet *Kultura* was repeatedly stressed also by several other Russians I later met, whose lack thereof was glaringly evident, it gave birth to my notion that "people often like to speak about things and virtues they admire, but rarely possess."

My diversion and respite from the stressful interrogation routine ended when Major Savchenko entered the office again. Being as coarse and boisterous as he had been during our initial encounter, Major Savchenko addressed me in his limited and atrocious German again, before he launched into a prolonged tirade, interspersed with threats and Russian vulgarities I hadn't heard before, when I again refused to admit that I was a German spy. That was followed by Captain Petrov's "confess before it's too late" admonition.

* * *

The events of the next few days and encounters with my interrogators were essentially repetitions of the preceding ones. What differed, however, was that my Hungarian cellmate, who was taken away at a very early morning hour by four armed Soviet guards, never returned. When I asked my Siberian sentry about him, he did not respond verbally, but made a distinct motion with his hands, which replicated the firing of a gun and meant that he had been shot.

As I sat in my cell during my short lunch break, still shocked about his sudden demise and upset about my own situation, I hungrily ate mine as well as my former cellmate's food ration, the guard had mistakenly left for him, or perhaps done so benevolently for me. Although I pondered the reason for his execution, the thought that this could also be my fate did as yet not occur to me.

That impression changed rapidly on the very next day, when Captain Petrov resumed his accusations and interrogative posture and my nemesis, the brutal and volcanic tempered Major Savchenko stormed into his office, whose mood was especially foul that afternoon.

While omitting his usual German prologue, which I soon realized was a bad omen, the massively built Major Savchenko planted himself directly in front of me, stared into my face and gave me the ultimatum, "Confess or be shot."

When I, after recovering from the initial shock about the sudden confrontation and death threat, refused to do so, Major Savchenko drew the revolver from his holster, pressed its nozzle against the very center of my forehead and shouted, "Confess, German son of a bitch, or I will kill you right here."

As shock waves of fear and panic began to surge through my mind and body, so also did my frantic thoughts "what to do?" Faced with the imminent threat to my life and lack of other options my first reaction was to comply. But when rage and bitter disappointment welled up in me and I realized that I might be shot or sent to one of the dreaded Gulags, either way, I closed my eyes and gritted my teeth in silent defiance. It was then that Major Savchenko pulled the trigger.

Whereas difficult to perceive that one can actually age years within just one split second, that is, however, how I felt during the minute fraction of time that elapsed between the trigger's release and impact of the falling hammer. When it failed to produce the dreaded explosion and I slowly opened my eyes, the diabolically grinning Major Savchenko opened the revolver's cylinder to show me that the hammer had fallen on its only empty chamber.

Having done so, he closed the cylinder and spun it several times, before he pointed the gun at my face again and said, "Do you want to try once more?"

Aware that the revolver was loaded, except for one missing bullet, and that the odds of surviving such devilish Russian roulette were exceedingly slim, I was about to brace myself and retreat into my former fatalistic posture when Captain Petrov interceded in my behalf. He persuaded the irate Major Savchenko to give him one more day, during which, he thought, I might finally come to my senses and cooperate. Having thus been temporarily reprieved from impending doom, I was taken back down to the dungeons, where I spent another long and sleepless night in my brightly lit cell.

* * *

When I faced the very somber looking Captain Petrov on the next morning, he began his interrogation with the chilling remark,

"Gruenberg, there will not be another day for you unless you cooperate and tell the truth. Do you understand?"

"Yes," I replied.

"Good," said Captain Petrov, while he reached for his pencil and pedantically straightened the writing pad on his desk. "Now tell me again how you, a Jew, was able to survive in Nazi Germany without being killed."

"I assumed the identity of a Catholic Ukrainian," I answered.

"Yes, that is what you told me," acknowledged the somewhat exasperated looking Captain Petrov. "Do you speak Ukrainian?"

"No, just a few words," I replied.

"How did you communicate?" inquired Captain Petrov.

"I usually pretended to be a *Volksdeutscher*, an ethnic German, and always spoke in that tongue," I replied.

"Didn't anybody become suspicious about your perfect German?" asked Captain Petrov.

"To prevent that from happening I spoke German with a slight Slavic accent, but always clearly so that no interpreter would be required," I explained.

"You must be a very good actor," commented Captain Petrov sarcastically. "Isn't that, in fact, what you are also doing right now?"

"No, absolutely not," I replied, "I just did what I had to, to stay alive".

After a short pause, during which Captain Petrov leafed through my file and scanned some of its contents, he looked up and said, "You also told me that you obtained a passport from the German authorities. Is that so?"

"Yes," I confirmed, "it is."

"How did that come about?" inquired Captain Petrov.

"It was actually a stroke of luck, more so than anything else," I said. "I befriended the female secretary of the officer in charge of my case, who came to my aid and had my passport validated by another officer, while her boss was absent."

"So, now that you had a German passport, why did they sent you to the labor camp?" inquired Captain Petrov.

"Because I was nonetheless considered an untrustworthy foreigner by the Nazis, as were all other forced laborers in the Austrian camp," I replied.

The interrogation continued along similar lines until Captain Petrov inquired what happened to my passport, but took a

drastically different course when I replied, "I destroyed it when the Red Army occupied the village I was hiding in."

"Why did you destroy it?" asked Captain Petrov.

"Because I was afraid your soldiers would shoot me when they discovered that I was neither a Ukrainian, nor the person as listed on the passport."

"Why didn't you explain your situation to them, just as you are doing here?" inquired Captain Petrov. "Or is it that you were afraid because it is a lie."

"No, that's not it," I said.

"What was it then?" asked Captain Petrov, who added, "we don't kill innocent people."

"I didn't want to take that chance," I answered.

"What do you think we are?" questioned the increasingly annoyed looking Captain Petrov, "Barbarians like the Germans?"

When I blurted out, "The way you are treating me isn't much different from that of the Gestapo," Captain Petrov, whose voice turned icy, said, "I will no longer put up with your impertinence or listen to your lies."

With that, Captain Petrov terminated the interrogation and ordered the guard at the door to remove me from his office. When I was about to be led away and I asked him, "What will become of me?" Captain Petrov glared at me for a few moments, before he replied, laconically and with an icy tone of voice, "Gruenberg, you will be shot tomorrow morning."

I don't know whether it triggered an automatic defensive system in me, or if it was due to my dismally bad physical and exhausted mental condition that I reacted strangely calm to his pronouncement of my death sentence. Instead of the acute terror I had experienced when Major Savchenko pressed his gun against my face and threatened to shoot me, I just felt numb and removed from the scene, as if I was only a peripheral spectator and what occurred did so to another person, not to me. I did, in fact, walk like a zombie when I was escorted back to the dungeons and turned over to my Siberian guard.

When he asked routinely, "How did it go today?" and I replied glumly, "I will be shot tomorrow morning," he remained as stoic as usual and made no comments when he locked me into my cell.

Having ostensibly been found guilty of the charges against me and thus considered an enemy of the Soviet people, my formerly

sympathetic guard apparently wanted to distance himself from me. That became apparent also when he omitted to slip one of his *machorka* cigarette butts through the peep hole, as he had often done in the past. He surprised me, however, when he, for the very first time since my incarceration in the Soviet GRU prison, turned the light off in my always brightly lit cell.

Although the satiric thought that he may have done so in lieu of the customary "Last Meal" occurred to me, it was soon replaced by the realization of my dreadful situation and impending doom.

Still dazed from the traumatic episode with Captain Petrov and the sudden darkness in my cell, I began to reflect on my past. On the goals I had aspired to, which I would never realize, and on my struggles and often daring maneuvers to stay alive in Nazi Germany, while successful, were now all for naught.

As I pondered the absurdity of the accusations against me and that of my fate, my mother's image rose to my mind. Having been unable to save her from the clutches of the Gestapo and missed her so very much, I thought of her boundless love and concern for me and my sister, Celia, whom I would also never see again. And as the tears came to my eyes, so also did the long overdue sleep that liberated me from my gloomy thoughts.

* * *

Deprived of sleep for about two weeks, except for very brief periods, and thus totally exhausted, I could probably have slept for days had I not been roughly awakened by my Siberian guard. Since his night shift usually ended at 7:00 AM and he was still present when I was picked up by four soldiers armed with rifles, I knew that my time had come, as it was in accord with their standard procedure and always during the early morning hours when executions were carried out.

Barely awake and with numbed senses, I walked amidst the four Soviet soldiers along the familiar subterranean corridor with its dark gray walls. We passed several sentries who were stationed before the cell doors, behind which other prisoners, unknown to me and thus faceless, probably languished under similarly harsh conditions and faced a similar fate as mine (one of them may, in fact, have been Raoul Wallenberg.)

When we went up the stairs and reached the landing on the main floor, where my escorts came to a halt, I suddenly heard a voice

calling my name. I scanned the area around me, but was unable to find its source in the sparsely lit hall whose offices were still closed at this early morning hour. It wasn't until I heard my name called again that I noticed the shadowy outlines of a person half-way up the dimly-lit stairway leading to the first floor, which I recognized as being that of Captain Petrov.

"Come here," ordered Captain Petrov, while he slowly descended a few more steps. When I did so, he faced me squarely and asked, "Gruenberg, have you told the truth?"

"Yes, I have," I answered.

"Did you, really?" queried Captain Petrov.

"Yes," I replied.

"Was all of what you told me true?" asked Captain Petrov.

"Yes," I confirmed. "All of it."

"Then go," ordered Captain Petrov after a few moments of silence.

Thinking he meant that I should continue with my escort, I turned and waited for them to proceed. But when they didn't move, and Captain Petrov repeated his command, and I, still dazed and unable to grasp its meaning, asked, "Go where?"

Captain Petrov motioned with his head toward the hall that led to the building's exit and said, "Go, Gruenberg. You are free."

Stunned by this unexpected turn of events and my last minute reprieve from execution, but also suspicious that it might just be a diabolic ruse by my Soviet tormentors, I moved cautiously and with slow robotic motions toward the exit. Only when I passed the sentries stationed at the large front gate and was able to put several paces between me and the dreaded Soviet GRU prison building, without being stopped, did I finally realize that I was indeed a free man again.

As I later learned, it was in the very same Soviet GRU building in Budapest, where Raoul Wallenberg, the courageous Swedish diplomat and hero, who had rescued tens of thousands Hungarian Jews from the clutches of the Gestapo and deportation to the extermination camps, was also imprisoned by the Soviets, before they took him to Russia.

Chapter 5

Odyssey

Having as yet no idea where I was, I kept on walking until I came to a broad Boulevard, named Rakozcy utca. Although a major thoroughfare, it was nearly deserted at this very early morning hour.

As I stood there pondering what to do, in the midst of Hungary's capital city, Budapest, with a three-week-old beard, badly wrinkled clothing, and holding my pants up with my hands, as my belt, confiscated by the prison guards, had not been returned to me, I must have been a strange sight to look at.

That became soon evident when I approached one of the few men on their way to work. After stopping for a moment, he evaded me by quickly stepping off the sidewalk before I could say anything. When that was repeated also by several others, I changed my tactics by remaining in my fixed position, while I called out in German to them. The results were equally negative, however, as they, after temporarily slowing down to have a closer look at me, continued on their way without a reply.

Thinking that they might perhaps not want to speak German, which some of them probably did, particularly those of the older generation who had been a part of the Austro-Hungarian empire before the end of the first World War, I switched to Russian. When that turned out to be equally unsuccessful and produced no response either, I decided to look for a Jewish person and began to search the passing faces for some familiar Semitic features.

When, after several more disappointing misses, a middle-aged man, carrying a leather briefcase, eventually responded and came to a halt, I attributed my success to the fact that I had coupled my search with addressing him in Yiddish. That, as I soon learned, was erroneous, however, as Hungarian Jews, like their German brethren, generally don't speak Yiddish.

While keeping an arm's length away, the man looked me over

from head to toe before he cautiously asked, in an accented German, "Who are you?"

"I am a Jew," I answered.

"From where?" inquired the stranger.

"From Berlin," I replied.

"From Berlin?" echoed the obviously surprised man. "What are you doing here in Budapest?"

"It's a long story," I replied. Although tempted to tell him about my imprisonment in the nearby Soviet police building, I thought it was better not to and said instead, "I am a refugee from an Austrian labor camp near the Hungarian border. Is there a Jewish agency in Budapest?"

"Yes there is," confirmed the man, while he motioned with his head to follow him. "Come with me, I will take you to it."

With that he took me first to a streetcar. When we got off, he began to walk briskly and without uttering another word until we arrived at the entrance to the Jewish Agency building in Budapest, located in the Sip utca 12. That is when my benevolent native guide, who may have been Jewish but never revealed himself as such, said goodbye and left.

After being questioned by a Hungarian representative, who also requested that I recite a holy Jewish prayer, to verify that I was indeed a brethren, I and a group other disheveled looking refugees were led to the showers in a nearby camp for a long overdue cleansing and delousing procedure. That was followed by a shave and a hair-cut. While the sick and disabled were taken to the barracks, I stayed with the others in the large courtyard, where we also ate our bowl of soup and bread given to us, which to many, including myself, was the first decent meal in quite some time.

Since the barracks were filled to their capacity with refugees, some of whom were very ill and still clad in the striped uniforms of concentration camps, and it was a reasonably mild day, I remained outside until darkness fell.

When I entered one of the overcrowded barracks to look for a place to sleep, I eventually found one by squeezing between several other bodies on the floor. But that was of short duration, as the penetrating stench of rotting human flesh and excrement around me was so pervasive and nauseating that I quickly went outside again, where I and several other refugees remained for the rest of the night.

When I woke up on the next morning and scanned the area around

me, my attention was drawn to three teen-age boys nearby. Unlike the other refugees, they were not only reasonably well-dressed and in apparent good physical condition, but also had conspicuous nordic profiles and blond hair. Since they didn't look Jewish and I wondered what they were doing here, I approached them and asked in German, "Where are you from?"

"From Holland," replied the oldest of the three boys, who also turned out to be their spokesman.

"Where did you learn to speak German?" I inquired.

"My friends and I are from the border town of Utrecht. That is where we learned to speak German." He also told me that they had been taken from their homes to Germany, where they had worked in a factory.

Since these had been routine occurrences in German occupied areas and sounded plausible, and I was preoccupied with my own problems, I didn't question its veracity. That, and the fact that the Dutch boys occasionally talked to me thereafter, soon came to haunt me when I encountered "Pepin the Short."

I don't know why the name of Charlemagne's father came to my mind, as there was nothing majestic or remarkable about this Pepin. However, I thought it was fitting for his extremely short and stocky physique, which may have been less than five feet.

Pepin, whose real name I never learned, was a Jewish soldier from the Soviet Ukraine who made his daily rounds in the camp, where he closely scrutinized and questioned all new arrivals. I also learned from him that his entire family had been murdered by German execution squads. Although his paranoia concerning anything Germanic was understandable, it was grossly misplaced when I became the unfortunate target of his suspicious attention.

In spite of the fact that he had already verified that I had been circumcised and conversed with me in Yiddish, Pepin was nonetheless suspicious when he learned that I came from Germany. "So, you are German," he concluded. "Did you serve in the German Army?"

"Of course not," I answered, "You know quite well that I am Jewish."

"Maybe so," snapped Pepin, "But you don't look Jewish."

"Don't be silly," I replied, "I am as Jewish as you are."

"Oh yeah?" said the suspicious Pepin, while he stared intently at me, "But there is something odd about you."

"Well, what is it?" I inquired, somewhat annoyed by his hostile attitude.

"German Jews don't speak Yiddish," said Pepin, "How is it that you do?" When I explained that my mother had mainly spoken Yiddish to me, it made no impression on Pepin, who left instead with the foreboding words, "I don't trust you and will keep a close eye on you."

As I sat in the courtyard, thinking of my latest problem with Pepin and the Soviets in general, and wondered why he had singled me out, the Jewish Agency official I had registered with, who stood nearby and had evidently overheard some of the dialogue, inquired in a low voice, "What does he want from you?"

Having no clue, I just shook my head while I turned toward him and replied, "I don't really know. He says he doesn't trust me because I am from Germany."

"I don't know if you are aware of this, but his entire family was killed by the Nazis. He hates the Germans and anyone connected with them," said the official.

"Yes, he told me about it and understand how he feels," I acknowledged, "but what does he want from me?"

"You are from Germany, aren't you?" asked the official.

"Yes," I confirmed, "But I am not German. I am Jewish."

"I know," said the official, "but since he is so suspicious, I suggest that you stay out of his way and leave this camp as soon as possible. He works for the Russian police and can be very dangerous."

"I don't know where else to go," I answered.

"Why don't you go to Bucharest, like many other refugees?" suggested the official.

"Why Bucharest?" I asked.

"Because there are active Zionist organizations in Romania who facilitate emigration to Palestine," explained the official.

"But I don't want to go to Palestine," I replied. "I have to go back to Berlin to search for my mother."

"Your Mother?" questioned the official.

"Yes, my Mother. She was deported to a concentration camp. I have to find her first and contact my sister in London before I can think of emigrating," I replied.

"I see," said the official, "But you can't go to Berlin now. The city has not yet been taken by the Allied forces."

"What about Vienna?" I queried, "Perhaps I can go there meanwhile."

"I would not recommend it," said the official. "The conditions in Vienna are still very bad and unsettled. Besides, there is an International Red Cross center for refugees in Bucharest. They could help you make contact with your sister in England."

When I pondered what to do and didn't respond, the official said, before he left, "Whatever your plans are, I suggest you leave soon to avoid having problems with the Russian police. Before you do, come to my office and pick up your identity card."

I was still undecided whether I should heed his well-meant warnings, when Pepin, instead of making his usual rounds in the camp, came straight toward me the very next morning.

After stopping just inches away from me with his feet spread wide, Pepin stared at me with his dark piercing eyes. While dispensing with the formality of a greeting, he said in a curt and threatening tone of voice, "I have arrested your Nazi friends."

Startled by his hostile posture and having as yet no clue what he meant, I inquired, "What Nazi friends?"

"Your German friends," said the hostile Pepin. "The ones you have been keeping close company with here in the camp."

"What are you talking about? I don't have any German friends here," I replied.

"Yes you do," asserted Pepin. "I have seen you talking with the three German boys numerous times."

Finally realizing whom he referred to, I said, "But those boys are Dutch, not German."

"What do you think we are, *Duraks*?" (Russian for stupid persons) asked the increasingly agitated Pepin. When I failed to respond, he continued, "You know quite well that they are not Dutch, but Germans."

"No, I didn't," I replied. "They told me they were Dutch. That they had been taken from their homes in Holland and forced to work in Germany. How did you discover that they are Germans?"

"They are not only Germans but also Hitler Youths," said Pepin, who added triumphantly, "we found their Nazi membership cards hidden in their shoes. Perhaps that is what we will also find when we take you in and search you."

"Take me in? Who in hell are you and what do you want from me?" I countered his threat with a growing feeling of outrage. "I

have just been released from a Soviet prison here and have no intentions to go with you."

Ostensibly surprised by my reaction and angry outburst, Pepin stared silently at me for a few moments before he demanded, "Let me see your release papers from the prison."

"What papers?" I answered. "They didn't give me any papers."

"No papers?" questioned the suspicious Pepin, while he shook his head. "Why were you in prison?"

"The Devil knows. I certainly don't," I answered defiantly. "If you want to know, why don't you go there and ask them."

"They must have had good reasons to arrest you," said Pepin. "What prison were you in and where is it located?"

"Right here, in Budapest," I replied. "I don't know the address, but it is a very large building next to a railway station. Not far from the Rakozcy utca."

Apparently familiar with it, which he indicated by repeatedly nodding during my description, Pepin said, "I will go there right now and inquire about you. If it turns out that they don't know you and you have lied to me, I will come back and have you arrested."

Having no intentions to take that chance and wait for his return, I went instead to the Jewish agency official I had spoken with, who handed me my newly issued identification card, written in Hungarian and in Russian. My name, now spelled, Grúnberg, Móric, in the Hungarian version, would undergo further changes in each of the other countries I later traversed. After he gave me a small sum of money and general directions, wished me a safe journey and we shook hands, I got on my way toward the outskirts of Budapest, where I hoped to be able to hop on a freight train going eastward toward the Romanian border.

* * *

Although my chances for getting on a train might have been better near a railway terminal in the city, I decided against it, as I have had very bad experience with the one in Komarom, where I had been arrested. Besides, the large railway station in Budapest which was adjacent to the Soviet GRU prison, would most likely be one of the first places my latest nemesis, the inexorably hostile and dangerous, Pepin, would search for me in the event he was inclined to do so.

With that in mind, and hoping not to encounter him on my way,

I began to walk along some of the secondary roads that led out of the city. Still clad in my gray coveralls with a rope tied around my waist, a replacement for my missing belt, I kept walking until I passed the outskirts of Budapest and felt a bit more secure from the threat of pursuit by my paranoid Russian brethren.

As darkness began to fall and I scanned the area for a shelter for the night, I came upon an elderly woman who was doing some yard work in front of a small farm house. When I approached her and she looked up, she turned and began to retreat toward the house. But when I stopped and called out a greeting in German to her, the woman who came to an abrupt halt, turned and smiled at me. Encouraged by that, I walked up to her and asked, "Do you speak German?"

"A little," she answered.

"I need a shelter for the night," I said. "Can you help me with that?"

After she hesitated for a few moments and studied my appearance, the woman nodded and said, "You can sleep in there," while she pointed to a wooden shed nearby.

Exhausted from the long walk, I spent the night on the straw and fell into a deep sleep, from which I didn't awake until mid-morning, in spite of the noisy chicken and recurring cries of the rooster with whom I shared the space. When I finally arose and went outside, the woman greeted me there. "How did you sleep?" she inquired smilingly.

"Oh, very well," I replied.

"I hope the chicken didn't bother you," she said.

"No, not at all," I answered. "I slept so well that I didn't hear them until I woke up." Noticing that she carried a small basket in her hand, I asked, "Are you on your way to collect some eggs?"

"Yes," confirmed the woman.

Having had no food since I left the camp in Budapest, except for some bread I had taken along, and thus very hungry, I inquired, "Can I buy some eggs from you?"

"Yes," said the woman. "How many do you want?"

"How many can I buy with this?" I asked, while I showed her the money I had.

"You have enough for ten eggs," said the woman after she counted the money.

"Do you have that many?" I inquired. When she confirmed that

she did, I said "Okay, I will buy them."

"What will you do with the eggs?" inquired the woman.

"Can you cook them for me?" I asked.

"Yes," she said. "Wait here. I will be right back." When she returned from the shed I followed her into the house, which consisted of one small room and a kitchen, whose tile oven took up much of its space,.

"How shall I cook them for you?" asked the woman after I settled down at the small wooden table in her kitchen.

"I would like them scrambled in a frying pan," I replied.

"How many?" asked the woman.

When I said, "All of them," a broad smile came over her wrinkled face that exposed her partially toothless gums. Then, while staring at me inquisitively, she asked, "Are you going to eat all ten eggs right now?"

"Yes," I confirmed, "all of them."

Having always been one of my favorite foods, either soft-boiled in the shell for breakfast, or fried as a main dish with creamed spinach and mashed potatoes, but never gotten more than one or two eggs at a time at home, as that was all we could afford, I had always wished for the day when I could eat as many as I wanted. Although imprudent to spend the little money I had on the eggs, and I would soon regret it as I felt very ill shortly after and could neither eat, nor look at eggs for a long time, I just couldn't resist the temptation to realize my long-time dream.

While she watched me eat the eggs and some bread she gave me, the woman continued to converse with me in her dialectic German. Although several generations removed from her Teutonic ancestry, her German was surprisingly good. After she inquired where I was headed, but not about my identity, which led me to believe that she may have assumed she was aiding a fleeing German soldier, I thanked her for the hospitality and left. Aware that I had a long journey ahead of me, which turned out indeed so, as Bucharest was about 400 miles from Budapest, I resumed my trek toward the east.

* * *

I continued on foot along the main road for the next few days. Being always wary, I made detours around Soviet road blocks and military police controls. Needing always manpower for labor on destroyed bridges and other projects, the Soviets frequently spread

dragnets over an area and grabbed whoever they could, regardless of origin or nationality.

When I came upon railroad tracks, I jumped onto the buffers of a slow moving freight train going eastward. While that was relatively easy, it wasn't to scale the doorless box-cars while the train was in motion. Being crowded with other free riders, they waved me off and refused to make space when I tried to enter.

I kept on hopping from one car to another, until I found one where I could settle down. That was only possible with the aid of a young Hungarian girl, who asked the people around her to make space for me and motioned that I should come in. When the girl addressed me in Hungarian and I indicated to her that I didn't speak her language but only German and Russian, she smiled and said, "I also speak a little German."

Surprised about the apparent widespread knowledge of German in Hungary, I inquired, "Are you of German descent?"

"No," she said, "But I learned some of it in school and from the German soldiers who occupied our town." While looking at me inquisitively, she inquired, "How about you? Are you German?"

Though not yet aware of the widespread anti-Semitism also in her country and the terrible fate that befell the Hungarian Jewry, I was intuitively cautious and always on guard. Having been a necessity for survival while I lived under an assumed identity amidst my enemies, I retained that characteristic for many years thereafter. Thus hesitant to reveal my true identity, I replied instead, "No, I just lived there for a long time."

"What is your name?" asked the girl.

"Maurice," I said, which was phonetically close to the Hungarian version and of my real name, Moritz. "And yours?" I inquired.

"Marika," said the girl, who then asked, "Where are you going?"

"To Bucharest," I replied. "And you?"

"We are on our way back home," said Marika, who also mentioned the name of a town in Hungary I had never heard of and quickly forgot.

"Why did you leave?" I inquired.

"We fled when the Russians came and went to stay with relatives near Budapest," explained Marika. She introduced me then to a middle-aged woman next to her who turned out to be her mother.

After a short conversation with her mother, during which she apparently informed her what she had learned about me, Marika

turned to me and said, "Bucharest is a long way from here. Why don't you come with us? You can stay in our house and rest before you continue."

When I didn't answer right away as I was somewhat perplexed by her invitation, Marika said reassuringly, "I have asked my mother and she agreed that you can stay with us. Think about it," she added when I still didn't respond.

As we continued our journey and conversations, I learned from Marika that her father had died while serving in the Hungarian army. She also told me that they lived on the outskirts of a city where they owned a small farm with cows and other animals, and that they had stashed away a good supply of smoked meats and other foods in a hidden bunker before they left.

Though clad in a dark wool coat that covered most of her body and a colorful babushka over her partially protruding hazelnut brown hair, as also worn by her mother and most other females in the box car, with matching brown eyes and a slightly freckled face, it did not conceal that Marika, whose age I estimated to be about eighteen, was a very pretty girl.

Attracted by the female companionship I had lacked since I left the Austrian village of Parndorf, and the lure of a long needed rest and good food at their place, I began to ponder whether to go with them, but eventually decided against it.

When I told Marika that I needed to go on and couldn't join them, her interest in me began to wane somewhat. But that did not extend to her cordiality, as she asked me to move with them to a flatbed car at the very end of the freight train when it came to a temporary halt. Having done so, I remained with Marika and her mother until they arrived at their destination and departed.

Except for the fact that the train was traveling eastward and that the terrain began to change into a more hilly one, I had no idea where we were. Nor did I know that we were approaching the Hungarian border with Romania, had it not been for a barely audible but clear voice that suddenly said in a dialectic German, "Be careful. It is not advisable to speak German here."

Startled by it, I turned toward the direction of the voice, which, to my surprise, came from a Romanian soldier nearby. Having moved with Marika and her mother from the more crowded area to the very back of the flatbed car where the soldier was also situated, he had apparently overheard our German conversation. Not certain,

however, since he didn't face me when he uttered those words, but rather stared in another direction, I moved closer and asked, "Why did you say that?"

"It is better for you not to speak German in this area," reiterated the soldier in a soft voice, without looking at me or shifting his position on the old wooden crate he sat on.

It wasn't until I inquired in an equally low voice, "Why is that a problem?" that the soldier briefly turned his head and said cryptically, "Because many here hate the Germans," after which he resumed his former position again.

Though puzzled about the soldier whose rather swarthy appearance was devoid of Germanic features, but who spoke its language fluently, I refrained from questioning him about it, as he indicated by turning his back to me that he wanted no further conversations. He remained in his position for several hours, until he suddenly slid from the wooden crate, slung his knapsack over his shoulder and said, "We are approaching the Romanian border."

"Will the train continue on?" I asked.

"No," said the soldier. "It will stop here in Groswardein."

"Groswardein?" I questioned.

"Yes," confirmed the soldier.

"Do you live there?" I asked.

"No," he answered. "I am from Klausenburg."

"Both are German sounding names. Why is that?" I inquired

"Because many Schwabs live here," explained the soldier, who referred to one of the German tribes that live in the southern part of Germany.

When he responded affirmatively to my question, "Are you one of them?" by just nodding, it solved the mystery about his intimate knowledge of the German language.

"What is the name of the area?" I inquired.

"Siebenbürgen," he replied.

"Siebenbürgen?" I questioned, as I was also unfamiliar with that name, meaning either seven mountains or castles in German.

"Yes," confirmed the soldier. "It is the German name for Transylvania."

Had I seen American "Dracula" movies with Bela Lugosi and Boris Karloff, I would have recognized its name and sinister reputation. Since that wasn't the case, the name Transylvania, besides sounding somewhat exotic, meant nothing to me. Nor did I know

anything about the territory or its multi-ethnic mix of inhabitants until I arrived at the train's final stop and noticed that the trilingual sign, "Oradea-Mare, Nagyvarod, Groswardein," was in Romanian, Hungarian and in German. This phenomenon would repeat also in other Transylvanian towns inhabited by similar ethnic groups.

Having long been a disputed area between Hungary and Romania, the latter was forced by Adolf Hitler, who wanted to reward his ally, the Hungarian leader, Admiral Myklos Horthy, to cede half of its Transylvanian territory to Hungary in 1941, which reverted to Romania again after World War Two.

When the train stopped at the border and I joined the multitudes of men, women and children who spilled out of the box cars, I came upon a small group of young people who had assembled around a man wearing a blue and white arm band. Since those were the traditional Jewish colors, I approached them and listened in on their conversations. which, to my elation, were mainly conducted in Yiddish. When I identified myself as a brethren and was invited to join them, the man with the blue and white arm band, who turned out to be a local delegate, led us to the Jewish community center.

Chapter 6

While most of the refugees with whom I arrived on May 2, 1945, in Oradea-Mare (the town's Romanian name), were put up in temporary quarters, I wound up in the local Jewish hospital. That came about when the rash I had been plagued with, that had spread over my entire body, was diagnosed as scabies, a transmittable infection caused by my prolonged exposure to unsanitary conditions and by sleeping in barns and open fields. After they covered my entire body with a thick and foul-smelling tar-like ointment, I spent the next few days in bed, wrapped in sheets like a mummy.

Although uncomfortable and a welcome respite at first, I soon became bored, as I had nothing to read or someone to converse with. My attempt to communicate with a young boy who occupied the bed next to mine was unsuccessful. Since he didn't divulge any information about himself and had been reluctant to answer any of my questions, I knew very little about him, except that his first name was Mottek, and that he came from Poland. He did, in fact, retreat behind an impregnable facade when I asked about his past and family and responded only sparingly to any other inquiries.

Apparently in his mid-teens, the short and strongly built Mottek, who was also afflicted with scabies, appeared to be in reasonably good physical condition otherwise. Though ordinarily not conspicuous, it certainly was so in this hospital where many of its refugee patients were grossly undernourished and seriously ill. Most noticeable, however, and shocking to me was, when Mottek briefly stared at me with his opaque black eyes, as they were as blank and as lifeless as those of a dead person.

Without a clue what hid behind these dreadful looking eyes and what horrors they might have seen, I was surprised and felt somewhat uneasy when the enigmatic Mottek began to attach himself to me.

He sat next where I did, stood in line with me for our food rations and followed wherever else I went, including to the

bathroom, where he waited in front of the door like a trained pet until I returned. Whereas pathetic and a nuisance at first, I got used to his persistent presence and began to take a liking to the quiet, non-intrusive Mottek, who rarely uttered a word to me or to anyone else. When I was released from the hospital and moved to another facility, set up by the Jewish agency, so also did Mottek.

* * *

Our first outing to the streets of Oradea, (the town's proper name, as the adjunct "Mare," meaning "great," was used by the Romanians mainly to thumb their noses at the former Hungarian occupiers) was an exploratory adventure for us. Neither Mottek nor I spoke Romanian or Hungarian, the predominant languages in this area. Although a substantial segment of its multi-ethnic population were Schwabs, who had settled there long ago as farmers and whose German dialect closely resembles Yiddish more so than any other, they were reluctant to use it with strangers.

As we strolled along the narrow and hilly roads and I scanned the rural area around us, strewn with a few small and primitive abodes here and there, whose outlines cast dark shadows on this sunny day, we also encountered some of its natives along the way.

Most were peasants who carried bundles of fire wood on their back, pulled carts with fresh produce, or drove their cows and other farm animals ahead of them. Though barely distinguishable from each other by their similarly plain and poor attire, they differed, however, in complexions and hair colors, that ranged from fair shades to others with very dark features.

We continued on the road until it led us to a square that was partially occupied with a fresh produce and flea market. Though much smaller and poorer, it reminded me of the Grenadierstrasse street market in Berlin's *Scheunenviertel*. After viewing its limited selection of produce, we went to the flea market section, which consisted mainly of worn and patched clothing, old shoes, some rusty implements and other such items that were of little use or value, except in extremely poor circumstances. We were about to leave and return to our quarters when I spotted a small restaurant on the square.

Being hungry and having some Leis in our pockets, the Romanian currency we had received from the Oradea Jewish Agency, we decided to go there. Since neither Mottek nor I understood

Romanian and the restaurant's proprietor spoke nothing else, we could not interpret the menu written with chalk on a plain wooden board. That is, except for the word "*mameliga*," which I recognized as being a corn mush, also known as kukurutz, maize or polenta in various other European countries.

I conveyed that to Mottek in a humorous manner by singing a few verses of an old Yiddish song, "*Romania, Romania, Romania, is gewehn a medine, a siesse, a sheine*," Romania was a sweet and beautiful area. When I continued the lyrics, which includes that its natives eat lots of "*mameliga*," and a smile crept into Mottek's face, it was the very first time that he had done so in my presence.

Unable to decipher any other dishes on the menu and basing our selections on the prices we could afford, our "potluck" choices of "*mameliga cu lapte*" and "*tsorba de fasola*" turned out to be just that, with mixed results.

Had I known any Latin based languages, as is Romanian, I may have recognized that "*cu lapte*" meant "with milk" and avoided it, as I had an aversion to it since infancy. When I ate some of the highly touted corn mush, I began to wonder about the Romanian's strange taste and fascination with the very bland and starchy *mameliga* and offered it to Mottek, who didn't share my negative opinion and finished it all. Our second selection was much more fortunate, however, as the *tsorba de fasola* turned out to be a good tasting bean soup, as also was the ample supply of freshly baked corn bread that came with it.

After a few more excursions to Oradea and its attractive surrounding area, during which we revisited the restaurant on the square and explored other places with steadily improving success, I began to concur with the Yiddish song that, "Romania was indeed a sweet and beautiful country."

With the good care and refuge provided by the Jewish Agency and enamored with its picturesque scenery, Oradea had become an oasis for me. So much, in fact, that I planned to stay there until I recovered from my long and arduous trek, after which I would decide whether to continue on eastward to Bucharest, or turn around toward my ultimate goal, Berlin. Considering my physical condition and state of mind, I would probably have opted for the latter, had it not been for Mottek.

Though generally close-mouthed and unresponsive to my inquiries about him, Mottek, who may have sensed my ambivalence,

broke his usual silence and asked, "When are we going to Bucharest?"

Somewhat startled and still undecided, I answered, "I don't know."

"But you will go to Bucharest with me, won't you?" questioned the worried looking Mottek.

"I am not sure if I will, or not," I replied evasively.

After a few moments of silence, during which he pondered the subject, Mottek, who rarely looked straight at me, did so with his opaque and seemingly lifeless dark eyes, while he emphatically urged, "But you must come with me to Bucharest. You must."

Having never seen Mottek so upset and distressed, whom I had taken under my wings since he attached himself to me and felt responsible for like an older brother, I was now in a quandary what to do. With Mottek's gaze fixed on me while he awaited my answer, I began to rethink my own situation and how to proceed from here.

Unlike many other Jewish refugees who had lost their homes and families and were now on their way to Bucharest, from where they hoped to get passage to Palestine, I had no reason to go there, except to register with the International Red Cross, through which I might be able to contact my sister in England, or vice-versa. However, considering how forlorn Mottek seemed without me, and the fact that Bucharest was significantly closer to our present location than Berlin, I decided to continue on eastward with him.

My decision to accompany him had a profound impact on Mottek, as his former enigmatic demeanor began to change from that day on. Besides being somewhat more willing to engage in conversations with me, Mottek also came out of his shell and revealed some details about his past. That came about while we were making our way on foot through the mountainous roads of Transylvania, past the city of Cluj, also named Koloczvar-Klausenburg, the very place that the German speaking Romanian soldier came from I had met on the train.

We had settled down near the road for a rest and ate some of the bread we had bought in Cluj, when Mottek asked, "Will you come along to Palestine?"

"No," I answered. "I have to go back to Berlin to search for my mother."

"What happened to her?" inquired Mottek.

"She was deported to a camp somewhere in Poland," I replied.

When Mottek just nodded without making any comments or continue his line of questioning, I asked, "What happened to your family?"

"They are all dead," said Mottek in a low voice,

"All dead?" I repeated.

"Yes," confirmed Mottek.

"How did that happen?" I inquired.

"The Germans came to our apartment. They took my parents and my brothers and sisters to the forest and shot them," said Mottek.

Shocked about the atrocity and terrible fate of his family, I put my arm around Mottek's shoulder to comfort him. I waited until he recovered from the visible pain the revelation had caused him, before I asked, "How did you survive?"

"I wasn't home when it happened," said Mottek. "I was outside, playing with a friend. When the Germans came with their trucks and began to round up the Jews in our area, we ran away and hid in the forest. That is where I saw what they did to our people.

"What happened there?" I asked.

"The Germans shot all of them, men, women and children," said Mottek.

I was appalled and profoundly distressed by his disclosure. Although I had been their target while I lived in Germany and had witnessed some of their brutalities and the deeply embedded hate of the Germans against the Jews, I never thought that they would resort to commit such heinous crimes as mass-murder of defenseless men, women and children. Since that was the case, as attested by Mottek (and many other eye-witnesses), my hopes for my mother's survival in a German concentration camp began to fade.

After a long pause of silence, during which I pondered my mother's sufferings and pain inflicted by the Germans, I shook off the gloom that had come over me and turned to Mottek. "Did you and your friend stay hidden until the end of the war?"

"No," replied Mottek, "We were soon caught by the Germans."

"How did that come about?" I inquired.

"After several days without food we decided to venture out of the forest at dusk and look for something to eat," said Mottek. "When we spotted a farm house nearby and approached it, the farmer, who must have seen us from his window, came out and asked what we wanted. We told him that we were hiding from the

Germans and asked whether he could let us have some food. The farmer, who probably suspected that we were Jews and who was visibly upset about our presence, said that we should wait inside his barn and remain there, as he wanted no one to know that he was harboring fugitives. He also said that he would come and bring us some food. When we heard the sounds of rapidly approaching footsteps sometime later and the barn door suddenly opened, it wasn't the farmer but German SS soldiers who quickly arrested us."

"It is hard to understand how a Polish person whom the German occupiers treated so brutally can betray his compatriots and deliver them into the hands of the hated enemy," I said.

"That is because they hate Jews more than they hate the Germans," said Mottek.

"What happened to you then?" I inquired.

"They beat us first with their rifle butts and then took us to a camp," replied Mottek.

"What camp?" I asked.

"Treblinka," said Mottek.

"Treblinka?" I questioned, "what kind of a camp was it?" When Mottek hesitated and didn't answer, I asked, "Was it a labor camp?"

"No," replied Mottek.

"Then what was it?" I inquired again.

"*Ein Vernichtungslager*," said Mottek after a small pause.

While Mottek's reply in German, which he hadn't used in my presence before and with whom I had only conversed in Yiddish, came as a surprise to me, I was absolutely stunned about the fact that he had called it a *Vernichtungslager*, an extermination camp. Being as yet unaware of the existence of such horrible death camps, as Treblinka, Maidanek, Sobibor, Auschwitz, and others, I inquired, "What happened in that camp?"

"They killed people there," replied Mottek.

"How did you survive?" I asked.

"I was assigned to work," answered Mottek.

"Where?" I asked.

"In the crematory," said Mottek.

I don't know why I asked, "What did you do there?" as I should have known what one does in such a facility, but I was so startled by his disclosure that it didn't occur to me.

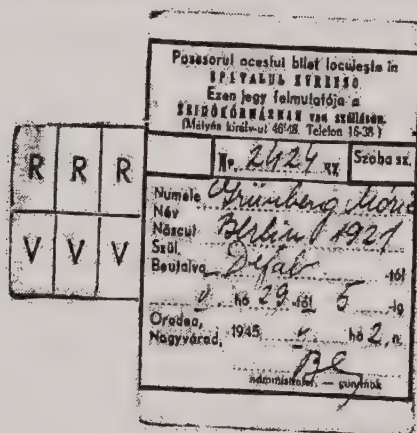
When Mottek replied, "*Sonderkommando*," and I, though aware

that it meant "special commando" in German, inquired what its functions had been, Mottek, whose gaze was fixed at a distant point while he spoke very haltingly and in a low voice, just shook his head and did not answer.

Although I could sense the pain our conversation must have caused him, I didn't know what hid behind Mottek's stoic mask and dispassionate demeanor.

It wasn't until many years later that I learned about the gruesome work of these so-called "*Sonderkommandos*." Their job had been to search the murdered victims for hidden valuables and extract the gold fillings from their teeth, all of which were sent to Germany's Central Bank, before they burned the corpses in the always burning flames of the crematories. Only then did I realize what horrors Mottek must have seen and what hellish conditions he had been living under. I also realized that his outward dispassionate demeanor and lifeless appearing eyes was only a protective cover, behind which the human flesh consuming flames of the inferno in Treblinka's death camp were still burning in his tormented mind.

Mottek never talked about his troubled past again while we continued our trek through Transylvania. Nor did he do so in Bucharest, where we eventually arrived after we hitched a ride on a freight train near the oil town of Ploesti.



Above This identity card, dated April 25, 1945, was issued to the author by the Hungarian Jewish Service in Budapest.
 Below A ration card from the Jewish hospital in Oradea, Romania. Dated May 5, 1945.

Chapter 7

Our concern how to find the Jewish agency in Bucharest soon eased when we arrived at its train station, as we and other refugees were met by persons with blue and white arm bands again. Also present were delegates of the AJDC, the American Joint Distribution Committee, who took us to a refugee center. After the customary cleansing procedure, followed by a short interrogation, to confirm our identity and establish whether we wanted to emigrate to Palestine, we received some food and a small amount of money.

When I indicated to the representative that I did not plan to emigrate to Palestine from there but rather go back to Berlin, he advised that I should keep that information to myself, as official permission for temporary residence in Bucharest and assistance was predicated on the former.

After the Jewish center closed for the day, whose offices and halls were crowded with refugees, they told us to go to a synagogue nearby where we would find shelter for the night. When we arrived at the synagogue, whose large wrought iron gate was locked, and asked the caretaker to let us in, he said he couldn't do so as the entire front yard as well as the inside of the building was already vastly overcrowded. So much, in fact, that some of the people were trying to sleep in sitting positions as there wasn't enough space for them to lie down. The caretaker suggested, however, that we should go a Zionist organization nearby, who might be able to help us.

Our attempt to gain entrance there was at least partially successful. When we knocked on the closed door and a person came out, he told us that they hadn't any space either. However, he agreed to let Mottek in when he learned that he had belonged to the same Shomer Hatzair organization in Poland. After I persuaded Mottek to stay there, who didn't want to unless I also had a place for the night, I asked the Zionist representative whether there was a Betar organization in Bucharest.

"Yes," replied the man. "Are you a Betarist?"

"Yes, I am" I confirmed. "Can you give me their address and directions?"

"Wait here. I will get it for you," said the young man, who soon came back with the information."

With that in hand and the fact that its location was nearby, I soon arrived at the small and somewhat dilapidated looking old building that housed the Betar in Bucharest. Although their space situation wasn't any better than that of the other Jewish organizations we had contacted, I was immediately admitted when I told them that I had been a member of the Betar in Berlin and assigned to a narrow cot in their crowded quarters.

Like those in Budapest, in Oradea and in other refugee centers I subsequently went to, the refugees were predominantly young Jewish men and women whose ages ranged from the mid-teens to the late twenties. That, as I learned, was because most of their elders did not survive the hellish conditions in the German camps. Since none of the refugees at the Betar house came from Germany, who were instead from various East European countries and thus spoke in differing tongues, Yiddish, the Jewish Esperanto became our common language.

My admission to the Betar house soon proved very fortunate for me. Besides having a safe place to stay in this strange city and be with people of similar backgrounds and ideologies, I also learned from them what was going on in Bucharest. Which of the Jewish organizations provided food, money and other support to the refugees, as well as the address of the International Red Cross.

While giving aid and shelter to homeless Jewish survivors was one of their functions, the main activity of the Betar and of the other Zionist organizations in Bucharest was to provide transportation for Jewish refugees to Palestine. Since the British government severely restricted Jewish emigration to Palestine and to their own country, the journey to The Promised Land, Eretz Israel, which, by necessity, was often of clandestine nature and with sea-unworthy ships, was thus very difficult and dangerous.

The British did, in fact, prevent many survivors of the Holocaust and other Jewish refugees from reaching Palestine. Of those who tried to evade the British blockade, 52,000 were captured and interned in concentration camps in Cyprus. That is where they languished until the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948.

After I picked Mottek up, who was housed nearby, we went to the main Jewish Agency in Bucharest, which turned out to be the very same refugee center we had been taken to when we arrived at the train station. They, in turn, sent us to the Romanian emigration office, where we registered on the next day for emigration to Palestine. That, as we had been advised, was required to receive government permission to stay in Bucharest.

We also learned that the Romanian government cooperated with the AJDC, the American Joint Distribution Committee, whose stamp appears on my Romanian identification card that was issued to me on May 14, 1945.

Our next trip was to the International Red Cross where we and a long line of other refugees registered as displaced persons. Having done all that, some money in our pockets, a place to sleep and food being no longer a problem, Mottek and I began to explore some areas of the city.

We went to an open street market we had heard about, where I bought a pair of new leather shoes at a very reasonable price (at least so it seemed at the time). We also visited a large city park named, Cismigiu, where we mingled with Bucharest's natives who traditionally promenaded there.

My contacts with Mottek soon began to decrease when he became more involved with the Zionist organization he belonged to and with the preparations to emigrate to Palestine. Although I missed his company, I was also glad that he had found a refuge with people of his background and Zionist views. Considering his incredibly painful and hellish past, and the fact that he had lost his entire family, Mottek, like many other displaced persons, needed a chance to begin a new life, which I hoped he would find in Palestine.

* * *

Unlike Mottek's situation and those of the refugees at the Betar house who remained there most of the day, I did not partake in their daily activities, which included the study of the Hebrew language, military drills and Betarist ideologies. Instead, I went out during the day and went to the Jewish refugee center and the International Red Cross where I hoped to find someone I knew from Berlin.

That did not materialize, however, at least not at first. What did happen instead was that Fortune, which had been a steady companion of mine for most of my covert existence during the

Nazi time, suddenly took a leave of absence.

That became evident when I got off a crowded street car and discovered, to my dismay, that the little money I had in my pocket was gone. Having always been very cautious and keenly aware of the activities around me, I was amazed about the proficiency of the Romanian thief who, as I learned, were some of the most slick and accomplished pick-pockets in this profession.

While I walked a short distance in the rain and thought about the loss of my money and how I could replace it, the second problem struck. My feet were getting wet. Since I was wearing my brand new pair of shoes, I was at a loss to understand what happened. It wasn't until I inspected the soles that I realized, to my additional sorrow, that they weren't made of real leather as the street market vendor had claimed. Instead, they were made of a simulated leather cardboard that was now soggy and coming apart.

When I told the representative at the Jewish Agency about my misfortune, he commiserated with me. Although unable to issue additional funds from the agency, he felt compassion with my situation and gave me some money out of his own pocket, just enough to get by until the next pay day.

As I sat outside the Jewish Agency's office, pondering about my two recent misfortunes and whether such mishaps really strike in sets of three, as believed by superstitious people, I was approached by a young woman. After a short greeting, she introduced herself as Hanna. Then she inquired in perfect German, "Are you from Germany?"

"Yes," I replied. "How did you surmise that?"

"I actually didn't," she answered. "When I asked the person in the office whether any of the new arrivals came from Germany, he pointed to you. What city are you from?"

"Berlin," I replied.

"Oh, how nice," exclaimed the visibly delighted Hanna, while she clapped her hands and said, "so am I."

"Really?" I said, "where did you live?"

"In Charlottenburg," she replied.

"Oh yes," I said, "I know it well. It's a real nice area." And so it was. Although quite far from the neighborhood I had lived in, I was indeed very familiar with Berlin's western sector of Charlottenburg where I had often visited its most famous Boulevard, the Kurfürstendamm.

When Hanna inquired, "And you, where did you live?"

I replied, "Near the Alexanderplatz."

"Have you seen anything yet here in Bucharest?" asked Hanna.

"Yes, a little," I said. "I have also been to a very nice park called Cismigiu."

"Ah, you mean, *"Küss mich Du,"* said Hanna (although phonetically similar, it means "you kiss me" in German). That, as I later learned, had been so renamed by German Jewish immigrants in Bucharest. When Hanna accompanied that with a hearty laugh, during which she futilely tried to cover her open mouth with her hand, I was shocked to see that it was almost toothless.

Following a brief, uneasy silence, during which the embarrassed and blushing Hanna tried to compose herself, and I wondered how Hanna, who was of similar age as I and of very nice appearance with her blond hair and fine facial features could have lost most of her teeth, she queried, "How are you managing here, Maurice?"

"Oh, so so," I replied. "I am just about getting by."

"I can help you get some funds," said Hanna after some deliberation, during which she also took a visual inventory of my appearance. "I know many German Jewish immigrants here. Some of them are quite well off and would surely be willing to help a *Landsmann*, compatriot in need."

"Oh no," I replied, while I shook my head, "I don't want to go begging."

"I didn't mean that you should," said Hanna in a consoling voice. "You won't have to beg anyone for help. Just leave it to me."

"Then what do you have in mind?" I queried.

"All I am going to do is introduce you to a few German Jewish immigrants here. There is also a Jewish club of former Berliners in Bucharest. The members will surely be delighted to meet you."

Considering my situation and that I might perhaps meet somebody I knew from Berlin, I agreed. "If that's all there is to it, I will come along."

"Okay," said the visibly pleased Hanna. "Meet me here at noon tomorrow."

* * *

"How did you survive?" asked Hanna, when we met on the next day and got on our way to a luncheon appointment she had made for us.

"It's a long story," I replied. "I did so by living under assumed identities."

"As a Christian?" queried Hanna.

"Yes, as a Christian," I confirmed.

"In Berlin?" asked Hanna.

"No, not in Berlin. In Vienna." I explained.

"And they never caught you?" inquired Hanna.

"No, never," I replied.

"That's fantastic," exclaimed Hanna.

"And you, how did you survive?" I queried.

"I also lived with forged identity papers for a while," said Hanna.

"Oh yes, where?"

"In various places," said Hanna. "But I wasn't as lucky as you. I was caught after a while."

"Where?" I inquired.

"In Budapest," said Hanna.

"By the Hungarians?" I asked.

"Yes, by the Hungarian police," confirmed Hanna. "But when they discovered that I was a German Jewess, they turned me over to the Gestapo."

"That must have been terrible," I commented.

"Yes it was," confirmed Hanna, who, after a brief moment of silence, said in a low voice, "That is where I lost most of my teeth."

When we arrived at our destination, Hanna said, "You will be surprised whom you are going to meet today."

"Really? Who is it?" I inquired.

"One of the Brenningkmeijers," said Hanna.

"A Brenningkmeijer? The ones who own the clothing stores in Berlin?" I asked.

"The very ones," confirmed Hanna.

"Are they not Christians and of Dutch nationality?" I queried.

"Yes," confirmed Hanna.

"Then what are they doing here?" I questioned.

"I don't know, but one of the Brenningkmeijers lives here and you are going to meet him soon," said Hanna.

And so I did. When we arrived at his apartment where I met a somewhat younger looking man than I had envisioned. Being in his mid or late thirties with brown hair, he was rather casually dressed in a shirt and trousers with old-fashioned suspenders. While his and

his brunette wife's reaction was polite when Hanna introduced me to them, it was also accompanied by a rather cool demeanor.

When that was followed by Mr. Brenningkmeijer's remark to Hanna, "He sure doesn't look like a Berliner," I was somewhat taken aback by it and began to feel uncomfortable.

It wasn't until later that I realized what may have brought this on. Besides being clad in the same old clothes I had worn throughout my long trek from Vienna to Bucharest, my skin was also deeply tanned from my constant exposure to the sun rays. Since I was not of Teutonic appearance with blond hair and blue eyes, as many Germans, but certainly not all of them are, I probably resembled a southern or southeastern European more so than Brenningkmeijer's perceived image of a Berliner.

When we began to converse about the city we had lived in, during which I exhibited an intimate knowledge of Berlin and occasionally also used certain dialectic expressions known only to native Berliners, Brenningkmeijer's doubts about my origin soon waned. That did not affect his demeanor, however, which remained as cool and indifferent as it had been from the outset, and I was glad when the luncheon ended and we left.

"Please, don't get me involved in situations like this one again," I said to Hanna. "I don't want to meet with people like the Brenningkmeijers. No matter who they are."

"I also felt a little uncomfortable about their cool reception," said Hanna. "But that is the way they are, stiff and impersonal, just like the Prussians. However," she continued, "they are quite prominent among the German immigrants here and have supported refugees in the past."

"Well, that certainly wasn't the case today," I retorted.

"Oh yes it was," said Hanna, who began to be a little piqued about my attitude. "We didn't just come here to have lunch with the Brenningkmeijers."

"Oh no? If not for that, what did we come here for?" I queried.

"For this," said Hanna triumphantly, while she opened her stretched out hand that held some paper money. "This is what we came for. Here, take it. It's for you," she added with a slight smile.

"I never saw him give you the money," I said, while feeling a bit sheepish about my rush judgment about the Brenningkmeijers. "When did that happen?"

"He gave it to me just before we left," explained Hanna.

"Thanks," I said. "What about you? Don't you need some of it?"

"No, I'm okay right now," replied Hanna. "Take it. This is your money."

"Well, thanks again," I said, while I took the money, "I appreciate what you have done for me."

"Oh, its nothing," said Hanna modestly. "I am just glad that I can help a Berliner compatriot."

While I stashed the money into my socks, Hanna, who watched me closely, asked, "Why are you hiding it there, Maurice?"

"Because I have had a very bad experience with pick-pockets here," I replied, after which I told her about my recent loss.

"Oh yes, that is quite common here," commented Hanna. "It is really a shame. Bucharest, which is also known as 'Little Paris,' is really a very nice place to live in. However, since there are so many crooks in this city, one must be on guard here all the time," a warning that would soon turn into a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Just before we parted, Hanna, who habitually tilted her head slightly whenever she asked a question, did so again when she queried, "Will you come with me to the Jewish Berliner Club?"

"Yes," I would like to," I replied. "Perhaps I will find somebody there I know from Berlin."

"Good," said the ostensibly pleased Hanna. "Lets meet tomorrow again at the same time and place. Okay Maurice?"

"Okay Hanna," I confirmed.

While on my way back to the Betar house, I stopped over at a candy shop where I bought two bonbonnières filled with sweets for Hanna and Regina. Unlike the independent and spirited blond Hanna, who reminded me of some other Berliner girls I had known, Regina was a rather quiet, brunette Jewish girl from Moldova who had survived the horrors of a German concentration camp. Having neither a home nor any family left, a fate that befell many other survivors of the Holocaust, and committed to the Zionist cause, she wanted to emigrate to Palestine.

Regina, whose unusually hoarse voice indicated that she may be suffering from a pneumonial illness, cared for me at the Betar house like a sister. She scrounged scarce razor blades and soaps for me and invited me to some of their social evening meetings. Having been a member of the Berliner Betar and their choir, and thus familiar with all their traditional songs, I helped out occasionally by teaching some of these to the younger refugees at the Betar house.

All went quite well until it became evident that Regina's feelings for me were more than just that of a *Chaver* (Hebrew for "friend"). When Regina realized that it wasn't reciprocal, her attitude towards me began to cool, as also did the ambiance at the Betar house.

* * *

Although she seemed pleased and thanked me for the sweets I gave her, Hanna, unlike at our previous meetings, was rather quiet and pensive when we got on our way on the next day. When I asked what was bothering her, Hanna said that she just felt a bit tired. Her mood changed quickly, however, when we arrived at the Jewish Berliner Club, where Hanna became very lively when we made the rounds and she introduced me to its members.

While I spoke with small groups of persons there, all of whom were of an older generation and unfamiliar to me, and answered their numerous questions about my past and about Berlin, Hanna collected donations which she kept stuffing into her handbag. When I finished conversing with the last group of former Berliners and looked for Hanna, she was no longer in sight. Nor could I find her when I searched for her in the crowded and smoke filled club room.

Thinking that she may have gone to the ladies room, I settled down near the exit of the club and waited for her. But when time passed and the club closed its doors for the day, and Hanna did not reappear, I realized that she had left without me.

At first I couldn't believe that Hanna would use me solely for her own gain and that I might not see her again. But when she did not appear at the Jewish Refugee Center or at any of the other places in Bucharest she had frequented before, and none of the people I questioned about her had any knowledge of her whereabouts, I came to the realization that Hanna had absconded with the money she had collected for me.

Although not certain, it is possible that Hanna may have been the very same "young blond Jewish woman from Berlin with noticeable bad and missing teeth," as described by Karl Neumann in my book, Berlin N-54, who betrayed him to the Gestapo in Budapest.

Chapter 8

The Long Way Back

With Mottek being in good hands, and having registered with the International Red Cross, I had accomplished what I came for to Bucharest. It was now time for me to get way back to Berlin and search for my mother.

After saying goodbye to Mottek, I went to the Jewish Refugee Center where I received a small amount of traveling money and a new identification card. That was augmented a few days later with a document by the International Red Cross in Bucharest, issued on May 18, 1945. Since it required a passport picture, which I didn't have, I used the one from the Romanian I. D. card.

With that, and some food I had bought, I began my trek back on the long road to Berlin. Though still clad in the very same old clothes and worn-out sandals when I arrived in Bucharest, my means of transportation differed. Instead of traveling in a freight wagon, as I had previously done, I was able to board a passenger train and travel in a regular compartment. I even had a seat for a while, until I gave it up to a rotund Romanian peasant woman who needed it more than I did, for herself, her baby and a few live chickens she had brought along as carry-on baggage.

While being in a passenger train was indeed a rare luxury for me, it certainly wasn't the ritzy Orient Express that had traveled a similar route before the war. Nor were its passengers of the so-called "upper-class," or the "nouveau riche." By the time I climbed over some baggage and persons on the floor of the train, and squeezed by others in the crowded passage ways, until I found a small space where I could settle down, I had met a cross-section of its passengers, who were of varying nationalities and spoke in differing tongues.

Besides the native peasants, who may have come to Romania's

capital city, Bucharest, to sell some of their produce, there were also Gypsies in notably more colorful dresses, a few well-clad urban gents, Hungarians from the Transylvania area, and several Slavic speaking persons.

Poorly dressed, as most of them were, and having no other possessions except what I had on my body, I blended rather well with the motley crowd of passengers, with whom I occasionally exchanged a few words. Although not easy, as I didn't speak their native tongues, I had sufficient knowledge of the Russian language to communicate with the Slavic speaking persons. As to the others who spoke Romanian or Hungarian, a few Transylvanians also knew some German became our translators. Whenever an impasse occurred and we needed additional help, we simply resorted to the universal means of communicating by using sign language.

Less communicative with me, but not so with the female passengers, was a couple of swarthy and rather conspicuously well-dressed gents with slick pomaded hair and moustaches, who tried to emulate Casanova. When their flirtations with much younger women than they were didn't pan out, they settled down to playing cards.

At first it was a game of five card poker. But when the money didn't flow their way fast enough, they switched to a "pick the ace" game with only three cards, which I recognized as being a phony shell game. Once they had fleeced the unaware peasants who participated in this game, the two con-men, who could have fitted into the milieu of an American 19th century gambling saloon or a Mississippi river boat, left for other fertile grounds on the train.

Aside of that episode, all else went rather well while the train made its way through the Romanian landscape. It would probably have remained so had it not been for the fact that a few railway cars were coupled on at nightfall. Unaware of this, it came as a shock to me and the other passengers when we suddenly heard screams of female voices and Russian curses nearby. I was about to go to the adjacent car to investigate the source of the commotion, when the door to our unlit compartment opened with a loud crack and several Soviet soldiers entered with flashlights in their hands.

What followed was a scene of sheer terror and chaos similar to the one I had experienced in the Austrian village of Parndorf. After the soldiers searched the men and stole their watches and other valuables, they dragged several women along and disappeared. Those who tried to resist or protest against the soldier's brutalities

were either severely beaten or threatened to be shot.

Having gone through a similar nightmarish episode once before, I was aware of the futility to challenge the inebriated and out-of-control Soviet soldiers, and used the existing bedlam to retreat to another car behind us. But when the marauding Soviet soldiers soon came to that compartment, where they continued their plunder and rape, I decided to get off the train.

As I stood near the exit, contemplating whether I should jump off the fast moving train or wait until it slowed down, it suddenly began to do just that and came to a halt at a station.

I quickly got off the train and into the terminal, as also did many of the soldiers and other passengers. When I noticed that its restaurant was still open, I went there hoping to get something to eat, but couldn't find an empty seat. Finally, after I waited and cruised around the crowded and smoke-filled room, I noticed that somebody was leaving and quickly took his place.

That is how I wound up sitting at a table with several Soviet soldiers and one Yugoslav officer who were already pretty well tanked up and in a jovial mood when I arrived. That was extended also to me when they learned that I could speak some of their language and I joined in when they sang, "*Yeschje savtra voyna*," if war comes tomorrow. Although a popular Russian marching song, it was no longer apropos, as the war with Germany had come to an end almost two weeks before, on May 8, 1945.

* * *

While the momentous event of Nazi Germany's demise was greatly cheered and celebrated throughout the free world and in the Soviet Union, neither I or Mottek had any knowledge of it, as it occurred while we were still on the road. It wasn't until we arrived in Bucharest that we actually learned of it.

Although elated and relieved that this monstrous evil had finally been defeated, it was also accompanied by much pain, tears and sorrow for the many innocent victims for whom victory had come too late. Thus, when the long awaited day of Germany's surrender finally arrived, it wasn't nearly as dramatic and joyous for me as I had thought it would be. It was, instead, more like an anti-climax.

* * *

I was in the midst of eating some soup and bread at the restaurant, when an argument suddenly erupted at our table. I don't know what caused it, but it began when two Soviet soldiers started to argue and shout at each other. When the argument became more violent and spread to others around our table, and the Yugoslav officer wanted to intervene, one of the Russians drew his pistol and pointed it at him. While the Yugoslav officer, whose face turned ashen, froze in his motion and remained in his seat, I quickly got up and left, just in time before the table was turned over and a brawl broke out. As I slipped through the nearby door to the men's room I heard a shot being fired.

My hope that I would be safe there was soon shattered when the door suddenly opened and two Soviet soldiers entered, whom I recognized as having been at the same table with me. They were dragging another soldier along with them. After they shoved the struggling man against the wall, they just held him there and propped him back up whenever he began to sag.

At first I didn't know what to make of it, as all the two Soviet soldiers did was to hold on to their captive and talk to him, until I focused my eyes on his face and realized, to my horror, that he had been shot. I could, in fact, very clearly see where the bullet had entered his cheek. Although very swollen, it oozed only little blood from its wound.

As I stood there, in shock about this frightful scene, I wondered what to do as the men were blocking the way to the exit. I tried to think of what I could say that might be apropos in such a bizarre situation, but couldn't come up with anything better than a simple polite banality in Russian, "*Isvinitye pajalusta,*" excuse me please.

Having no idea what their reaction would be, I felt relieved when one of the soldiers just turned his head, stared at me for a brief moment, and said, "*Pashlie,*" go ahead, while he made room for me to squeeze by.

Glad to be out of there and the restaurant, that was now partially in shambles, I pondered what to do next. Although the train I had come with was still standing at the station where it was taking on fuel, water and some cargo, I had no intentions to reenter any of its compartments as some of its former passengers and the Soviet soldiers did. Instead, I decided to remain there until I could board another one, a freight train perhaps that didn't carry any Soviet troops. However, when the passenger train I had come with slowly

began to move out of the station and I noticed that it had an empty freight car at the very end of it, I changed my mind, seized the opportunity and hopped onto it.

My thought that I would be safe there from the marauding Soviet soldiers was confirmed when I was able to spend the entire night in the freight car without any disturbance. That changed after daybreak, however, when the train briefly stopped and a Soviet soldier suddenly appeared.

When he discovered that I was in the car, he pointed his gun at me and shouted, "Who are you?"

"A Jewish refugee," I replied, which had become a repetitive and standard answer by now.

"Show me your documents," ordered the soldier while he kept his gun aimed at me.

At first I showed him the identity card from the Jewish Agency in Bucharest. But the soldier, who was apparently as unfamiliar with the Romanian language as I was, shoved it back to me and said, "That's no good. What else do you have?"

When I gave him the International Red Cross document and he saw my picture and the red cross on it, his face lit up with an expression of recognition, while he said, "Ah, you are a doctor."

I don't know how he arrived at that conclusion, since the document clearly stated in five languages, one of which was Russian, that I was indeed who I claimed to be, a refugee from Germany. However, since the soldier either didn't take the time to read the document or was perhaps illiterate, as some of them were, I decided to leave it at that.

After he lowered his gun, shook my hands and shared one of his *machorka* cigarettes with me, the first one I've had since my imprisonment in Budapest, he confided in me that he was ill. Before I could question him about it, the soldier unzipped the fly of his pants, took out his penis and said, "Look at this, Doctor. What kind of sickness is this?"

Stunned by this development and devoid of any medical knowledge, I took a quick look at it and diagnosed the sore on his penis as being a harmless skin rash, which I communicated to him as best as I could. Had I had any medical training I might have recognized that the open wound on his penis may, in fact, have been caused by Syphilis, a very serious and widespread venereal disease at that time.

Noticeably relieved that his was not a serious illness, the soldier thanked me for the good news and asked whether I was hungry. When I confirmed that I was, he said to wait there for him and that he would return very soon. That turned into a grotesque situation, as the soldier didn't just come back with some food for me, but also with several of his comrades.

While some came to consult with me about an illness, others just did so to meet the train's resident physician. Since I had no medicines to dispense, which may have been fortunate, as I could have caused some harm to my patients, I just tried to diagnose their illnesses as best as I could, gave some, what I thought, common-sense advice, and commiserated with them.

When the word spread among the Soviet soldiers that a doctor was on the train, so did their visits to the freight car I was in. Since that was accompanied also by some food and cigarettes for me, I was well supplied for the rest of the trip until we arrived at the Hungarian border, which was the train's final destination.

Stranded and without transportation, I began to make my way via foot again, except for occasional short rides on farmers horse drawn wagons. I foraged for food wherever I could and slept in barns and deserted houses. That went on until I was able to hop on a west-bound freight train.

Unable to enter the cars, which were fully loaded with cargo or people, I searched until I found an empty spot on a buffer, which took some time, as other free riders, like myself, were everywhere on this train. They clung to the side rails, stood between the cars, and sat on the roofs.

Although straddling the buffer like a horse soon proved to be uncomfortable and dangerous, as I had neither reins nor little else to hold on to while the train traveled on unstable tracks that were in great need of repair, it was also exhilarating at times as I felt like a cowboy on a wild ride in a rodeo show.

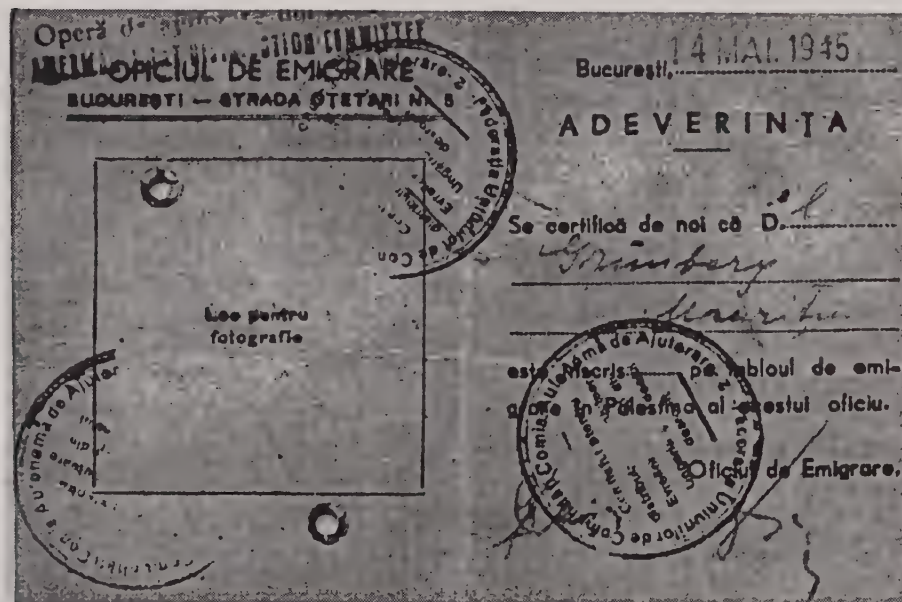
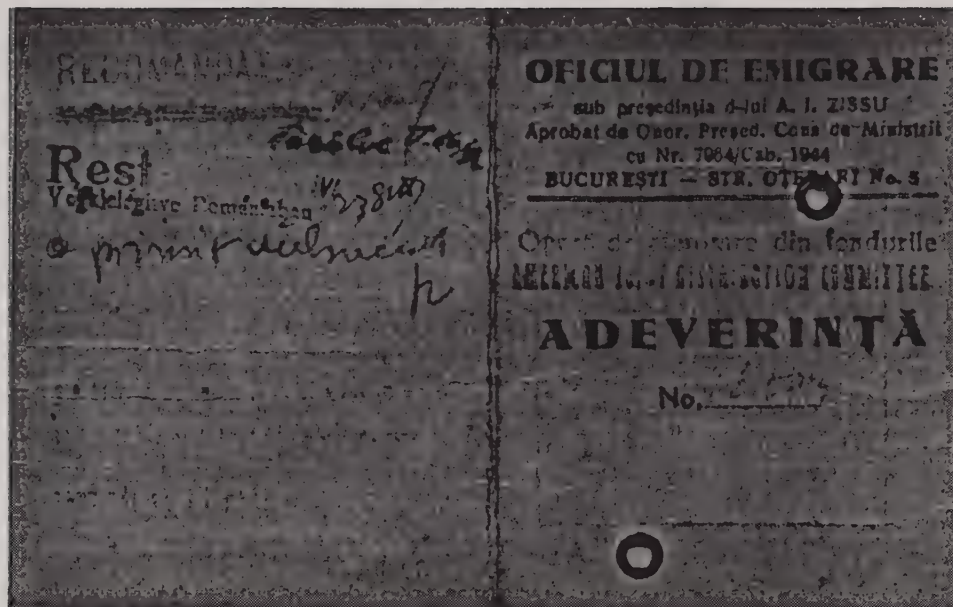
That was rather mild and tame, however, compared to a man and woman situated directly across from me who were riding on a buffer as I did. While they did that in tandem for some time, with the woman being in front and the man in the rear whose arms were slung around her waist, they changed position when it began to rain.

At first I thought that they had done so to protect themselves from the rain, until I realized that the woman, who had turned around and was now straddling her partner, had embarked on a much

wilder, more pleasurable and exhilarating ride than mine was, and that the couple, who were now facing each other, also made far better use of the bumpy motions of the buffers than I did.

As the driving rain quickly penetrated my clothing and I clung to the wet and now very slick buffer, as best as I could, just a few feet away from the couple, who were still on their joy ride and oblivious to their surrounding, I was struck by the bizarreness of the situation and began to laugh.

My humorous spirit was soon doused, when I became totally drenched by the rain that never stopped and I felt ill and feverish when the train arrived at the Budapest railway station. So much, in fact, that I had to stay over in Budapest for a while to recover from a severe case of a cold and fever, before I was ready to continue my trek towards Berlin.



This identity card, issued to the author on May 14, 1945, by the Romanian Office for Emigration in Bucharest, also bears the stamp of the American Joint Distribution Committee. The Romanian government cooperated with the AJDC, to facilitate the emigration of Jewish refugees to Palestine. The Picture was transferred to the International Red Cross Document on the next page.

COMITE INTERNATIONAL DE LA CROIX-ROUGE
DELEGATION EN ROUMANIE
OEUVRE D'ASSISTANCE POUR LES EPROUVES DE GUERRE
SECTION EUROPE SUD-EST ET CENTRALE

Tel. 20.34
 14, rue de la Croix-Rouge - BUCAREST

No. 212/51
 M-5-13

BUCAREST, le 18. Mai 1945
 STE. EREMA GHEORGHIU 15

LÉGITIMATION

Nous certifions que M. Grinberg Mauritiu réfugié de Allemagne séjourne sous notre protection au territoire de Roumanie et il réside actuellement chez son oncle.

Nous prions toute Autorité de l'aider en vue de ce but.

LEGITIMATIE

Adverim că Grinberg Mauritiu refugiat din Germania a locuit sub protecția noastră pe teritoriul României, de unde se întoarce acum acasă.

Rugăm toate puterile să-l ajute în vederea scopului său.

IGAZOLVANY

Igazoltuk, hogy Grinberg Mauritiu menekült, védelmünk alatt tartókodott Románia területén, ebből most otthonába tér vissza.

Felkérünk minden hatóságot, hogy őt céljában támogatja.

LEGITYMACJA

Niniejszym świadczamy że Pan Grinberg Mauritiu uchodzący z Niemiec zamieszkiwał pod naszym ochroną w Rumuni i wraca obecnie do domu.

Prosimy wszystkie władze o udzielenie mu wszelkiej możliwej pomocy.

УДОСТОВЕРЕНИЕ

Настоящим удостоверяется, что пред'явитель сего беженца из Германии проживал на территории под нашим покровительством. В настоящее время он(а) возвращается на родину, вследствие чего мы просим все власти оказывать ему(ей) возможное содействие.

ОРГАНИЗАЦИЯ ПОМОЩИ МЕЖДУНАРОДНОГО КРАСНОГО КРЕСТА
 Секция Юго-Востока и Центральной Европы.

Comité International de la Croix-Rouge
 Centre d'assistance aux épreuves de guerre
 Section Europe Sud-Est et Centrale

This document was issued to the author on May 18, 1945, by the International Red Cross delegation in Bucharest, Romania. It certifies in five languages that he is a refugee from Germany, and under its protection in Romania. The picture was taken from the Romanian identity card on the preceding page.

Chapter 9

Once ready to resume my journey, I went to the railway station in Budapest to board a passenger train toward the Austrian border and Vienna, my next major stopover. I was barred from doing so by a Soviet sentry, however, who guarded the entrance to the platform. When the soldier asked for my identification papers and I showed him the Red Cross document, he only glanced at it, shook his head and told me to leave.

Thinking that they might be able to help, I went to the nearby Hungarian Red Cross office, who certified on the back of the document that I was a refugee in need of repatriation from Budapest to Berlin. When I presented that to the Soviet sentry, who either couldn't read or didn't care, he just shrugged, waved me off and refused again to let me enter.

While I pondered what to do, I noticed the comings and goings of Soviet personnel at a nearby command post. Since Budapest's main railway station and its operation was under Soviet military control I decided to go to its office, where I hoped to get permission to board the train.

Although I was able to gain entrance there, due to my ability to speak some Russian, help was not forthcoming, at least not right away, as the sergeant located at a desk in the ante-room said that he couldn't do anything for me. Only when I insisted to see the commanding officer did he eventually lead me into another room where I came face-to-face with the commander, a Soviet general.

"Are you German?" queried the general after he looked at my Red Cross document.

"No," I replied, "I am Jewish."

"A German Jew from Berlin?" inquired the general.

"Yes," I confirmed.

"Why do you want to go back to Berlin?" asked the general.

"To find my mother," I answered.

"Your mother? Does she still live there?" inquired the general.

"No, but she might come back there," I replied.

"Back from where?" asked the general.

"From the concentration camp she was deported to by the Germans," I answered.

After a small pause, during which he intermittently nodded while he studied the Red Cross document again and my appearance, the general instructed one of his staff members to issue a document to me with which I could board the train. With that in hand I went back to the same Soviet sentry who had twice refused to let me enter. Being visibly annoyed when I reappeared, he demanded to know, "What do you want this time?"

"I have permission from your Kommandant to board the train," I explained.

"Who in hell gave you the permission?" asked the soldier. "Let me see it?"

"It's from your general," I explained while I handed him the document.

"Oh, from my general, eh?" mocked the soldier, whose clamorous demeanor may have been induced by the influence of alcohol he reeked of. When I pointed to the general's signature on the document, the soldier just laughed out loud. Then he tore the document into several pieces and threw them into my face, while he shouted, "Up here I am the general. Do you understand? Now, get out of here."

Taken aback by his abrasive demeanor and flagrant disregard for the authority of his superiors, I quickly gathered the scattered pieces of the document and went back to the Soviet command post. When I informed the general about the episode with the sentry and showed him the torn document, his face turned crimson. He ordered that I be escorted to the train and dispatched an officer and two soldiers to bring the rebellious sentry to him.

After they quickly disarmed the sentry by removing his automatic rifle and the cursing officer gave him a beating with the butt of his gun and a few kicks to boot, they dragged him away to the command post, where he most likely received additional punishment. With the obstinate sentry out of my way, I was finally able to board the train that was still standing at the platform. Unlike the other trains I had traveled with, which had all been very crowded, I had no problem finding a seat in this one, right next to a young Russian officer whose rank was that of a first lieutenant.

Looking Nordic rather than typically Slavic, with closely cropped blond hair, blue eyes and fair complexion, the officer was dressed in a well-fitting uniform that further enhanced his attractive appearance. My favorable impression of the officer was ostensibly shared also by a young woman who occupied a seat across from him, with whom the officer futilely tried to have a conversation. While his flirtatious attempts were received by her with an encouraging smile, they bore no further fruits as she understood no Russian and he, as it turned out, spoke no other languages.

For a while I just sat there quietly and observed their silent and mostly futile attempts to communicate, until I began to feel sorry for the officer whose inability to converse with the young lady caused him to become discouraged. So much, in fact, that he raised his hands in a gesture of frustration and finally gave up. It was then that I decided to intercede and be of assistance to them.

Though not yet aware of the young woman's nationality, whose attractive and finely cut face and brunette hair was accompanied by a petite and trim figure, I suspected that she might be Austrian. That was soon confirmed when I asked whether she spoke German and she did so with a typical Austrian accent. Having established that we spoke a common language, I inquired, "Are you interested to have a conversation with the Russian officer?"

"I wouldn't mind," replied the young woman. "He seems to be a very nice person. But I don't speak Russian."

"Yes I know," I said. "But perhaps I can help out since I speak some Russian."

"Oh, that would be very nice. But it is really up to him whether he wants to speak with me," said the young woman somewhat coyly.

"Well, that's easy to find out," I said. I turned to the officer who had witnessed our conversation without understanding anything, but whose eyes lit up with delight when I greeted him in Russian. When I translated my conversation with the young woman and offered to act as an interpreter, he eagerly accepted.

Thus began a tri-party conversation that lasted throughout the trip. While it was at first with the young woman and of flirtatious nature, which I interpreted as well as I could, the officer then turned his attention to me. He inquired about my past. About life in Berlin and how I survived. We also discussed music, its composers, as well as literature and the authors of some books we both had read.

Based on his knowledge of these subjects, it became evident to

me that Igor, who came from Leningrad, had an extensive cultural background. Aside of the fact that Igor also voiced the typical Soviet propaganda which touted the superiority of Soviet "*Kultura*," a spiel I was well familiar with and didn't dispute, all else went rather well. When the train approached the Austrian border, Irma, which was the young woman's first name, inquired, "What is your destination?"

"Vienna," I replied,

"This train will not continue beyond the Austrian border," explained Irma. "You will have to take another one to Vienna. But that train won't be leaving until the next morning."

"How do you know that?" I inquired.

"Because I live here," replied Irma. "I don't know the exact departure time, but you can get that from the station master."

"Well, I guess we will have to stay tonight at the train station," I surmised. When I translated for Igor what I had learned from Irma, he came up with a better suggestion.

"Look here," said Igor, while he opened his haversack and took out several packages with delicious looking country bacon, bread and sausages. "I have lots of other good food in here and a bottle of vodka. More than enough for the three of us. Why don't you ask Irma whether we could stay over at her place? We could all have a good meal and sleep a little before we continue our journey."

"I don't know if I can do that?" said Irma when I proposed that to her. "I don't live alone in the house."

"Who else lives there?" I inquired.

"A few relatives," she replied somewhat evasively.

"Why don't you invite them to share in the meal?" I suggested. "I am quite sure that the officer wouldn't mind."

"Well, that is not my main concern," said Irma. "He is. I don't know whether I can trust him."

"I think you can," I assured her. "He is a very nice and civilized fellow. Besides, I am going to be there and will see to it that no harm will come to you."

I don't know whether it was my assurance that helped to make up her mind, or the lure of the delicious food that was so very scarce and difficult to come by, but Irma eventually agreed after some pondering and invited us to stay at her house for the night.

When we approached the building, a two floor structure with an A-frame roof, which was only a short walk from the railway station

and on the Austrian side of the border, Irma asked that we wait for a few moments. She returned soon thereafter and led us inside.

Since no one else was present when we entered the house, I assumed that Irma's relatives had moved to the second floor, which seemed indeed so, as Irma kept shuttling back and forth there throughout the night.

Once we had settled around a large wooden table that stood in the middle of the room, Igor opened his haversack and spread an array of food on it. It consisted of the bacon and sausages he had previously displayed, a loaf of dark bread and a few onions, all of which was staple food for the Soviet soldiers I had met so far. He also added a few cans with as yet unknown contents and then took out a large bottle which, I presumed, was the vodka he had talked about.

Before we began to eat the mouth-watering food on the table, Igor asked Irma for a few glasses. When she returned with three small glasses, suitable for alcoholic drinks, Igor shook his head and asked her to exchange two of those for large water glasses. He did, in fact, specify that they should be for *sto gram* (100 grams), the equivalent of about 8 fluid ounces. After Irma fetched them for us, Igor kept one of the glasses for himself and set the other one in front of me.

He filled the glasses to the very rim and said, "Let's have a drink first." With that, Igor raised his glass with the Russian toast, "*Nastroyiya*" (to health), and drank it all.

When I tried to duplicate Igor's feat, I almost choked on the drink and quickly stopped, as it turned out to be much stronger than I had expected. Nor was it vodka, but rather slybovice, a very potent and slightly sweet tasting liquor made from plums, that is very popular in the Balkans and some other East European countries.

"What's the matter, Maurice?" asked Igor who stared at me while he remained in the same position with his empty glass still raised. "Why don't you finish your drink?"

"I can't drink so fast," I replied a bit sheepishly, before I took another sip of the slybovice.

"Come on, Maurice. Don't put your glass down. Drink like a man," urged Igor, whose eyes remained fixed on mine.

With the mocking Igor urging me on and to avoid the embarrassment in the presence of Irma who had finished her small glass with the strong brew, I held my breath and quickly swallowed

the remaining drink. Having never consumed so much alcohol within such a short time, I didn't know what to expect and feared for its consequences. To my pleasant surprise, it resulted only in a sudden surge of warmth that spread through my body, coupled with a relaxed feeling.

"*Vot charasho*" (that's good), said the smiling Igor approvingly while he slapped my back. "Now lets have something to eat."

Although pretty drunk by now, I didn't feel any other debilitating effects as yet, except for a heavy tongue and some giddiness, while I joined Igor and Irma in the delicious meal. And that it was, as food such as bacon, sausages, good bread and some of the other delicacies that Igor took from his haversack, were either severely rationed, or not at all available. (It would, in fact, take several years in these war-torn countries until a somewhat normal supply of food was reestablished.)

Having long been starved, and with food being so ample, we probably consumed the equivalent of a family's total weekly ration in one single night. While indeed so, it was also aided by the fact that Igor most likely fed more than just the three of us, as Irma, who kept shuttling back and forth to the second floor, always took some food along.

When Igor became aware of it and asked who the recipients of the food were, Irma claimed vaguely, as she had previously done, that it was for her relatives upstairs. But when Igor continued to inquire about her relationship to them, Irma became flustered and didn't answer.

Being the interpreter and with Igor awaiting her reply, I said, "Irma, he is waiting to hear from you. You don't need to worry about it. Just tell me who they are."

It was then that Irma, whose tongue may have been loosened by the slybovice, turned to me and said in a hushed tone, "Please don't tell him, Maurice, but it is my husband and my children who are up there."

With my thinking process measurably slowed by the large amount of alcohol I had consumed, I couldn't fathom why she had consented to let two strangers, an unknown Soviet soldier and a Jewish refugee stay over night in her house, while her husband and children were hiding upstairs. But then it dawned on me that she had probably done so to feed her hungry family. Having no intentions to divulge it, I turned to Igor and said, "It is her sister's family."

As the night progressed and Igor and I had a few more drinks of slybovice, all else that followed became very hazy in my mind. The last thing I remembered was that Igor and Irma were dancing while he sang a Russian song, after which I must have passed out.

I was awakened in the early morning by Igor who splashed some water on my face. He said that he and Irma would take me to the railway station, which they proceeded to do with much effort as I could barely walk and stay awake. Once we arrived at the station, they deposited me on one of the benches and told me that my train was soon due to arrive. With that they said goodbye and left.

Unable to keep my eyes open, I fell asleep again. When I woke up I noticed that the train station was totally deserted, except for the station master who was coming my way. I asked him, "When is the train to Vienna arriving?"

"The train to Vienna and several others have long come and gone," said the station master.

"How is that possible?" I asked, "I just came here a little while ago."

"No, young man, that was yesterday," explained the station master. "You have been sleeping here on the bench for the last twenty four hours."

Though still very tired, feeling sick and dizzy, brought on by the large amount of alcohol I had consumed, I was able to stay awake this time and boarded the next train to Vienna, where I arrived on June 20, 1945.

Chapter 10

Now that I was the refugee, Mauritius Gruenberg, as listed on the International Red Cross document, instead of the Ukrainian resident, Ivan Bauga, my former pseudonym in Austria, I needed permission from the authorities to stay in Vienna. That and some ration cards for food and other basic items were issued to me when I registered as a Jewish refugee. After I found a shelter in a refugee center in Vienna's 2nd district, I was finally able to rest, which I badly needed, as I had a relapse of my recent influenza, which turned into a severe case of pneumonia.

After recovering from this debilitating illness I felt a bit better and went to visit Krystos, my former Greek roommate, who was delighted to see me and surprised when he learned about my real identity. Very little had changed for Krystos. He still lived at Mrs. Prishing's apartment in the Neumanngasse and worked at the Gertlinger's tailor shop. He also had the same Austrian girlfriend whom he planned to marry.

I also had a joyous reunion with Leni, the young girl I had met during my clandestine presence in Vienna. Being the child of a mixed racial marriage, and subjected to chicanery by the Austrian Nazis, she had survived the war and the persecution.

My next visit was to Vera, whom I had also met in Vienna. Although a hostess to high ranking German officers, allied foreign dignitaries and members of the Gestapo during the war, whom Vera supplied with female companionship and entertainment, I suspected that my beautiful but also enigmatic Verushka was, in fact, a spy.

When I disclosed my real identity to her during our reunion, Verushka smiled and looked straight into my eyes, while she said very softly, "I suspected that you were not who you pretended to be, Maurice."

"Would it surprise you if I told you that I had the same feeling about you?" I asked.

"I thought that you might, since you are a very perceptive

person," replied Vera. Since she did not volunteer any information about her real identity, I didn't pursue this subject any further.

Unlike my meetings with former acquaintances and friends in Vienna, the next one came totally unexpected. I was strolling along the fashionable Kärntnerstrasse, located in the very center of the city, when a familiar looking young woman came towards me whom I immediately recognized. It was Hanna, the Berliner girl who had absconded with the money she had collected for me in Bucharest.

When I quickly stepped in her way and said, "Hello, Hanna. What a surprise to see you here," her face turned ashen. "Do you remember who I am?" I inquired.

"Yes, Maurice, I do," replied the visibly embarrassed Hanna.

"Tell me, Hanna, what happened to you and the money you collected for me?" I queried.

When Hanna, after some hesitation, broke into a broad smile, and said, "This is what I needed the money for," I was stunned, as the former nearly toothless Hanna now had a mouth full of beautiful new white teeth. Feeling compassion for her, and with my anger quickly dissipating, I just said "goodbye" and wished Hanna good luck on her way.

* * *

Once I had recovered from my illness and regained some strength, I decided to move on again and went via a passenger train to Prag, the capital city of Czechoslovakia, where an identification card was issued to me by the Repatriation Office. After a short stay at a refugee center, and a few quick glimpses at Prague's famous, but now somewhat tarnished golden roofs, I traveled to the Czech border town of Decin-Podmokly, where I planned to cross the German border and continue my journey via train toward Berlin.

When that was not possible, as the railway tracks on the German side had been destroyed during the war, I went, instead, on a ferry boat, which would take me along the Elbe River to the nearby city of Dresden.

As soon as I boarded the ferry, the German operator, a middle-aged man, stared at me with unconcealed hate. At first I didn't know what brought this on, until I realized that he stared at my gold chain with a Jewish Star of David I had recently bought in Vienna. Although I never wore jewelry, I purposely wore the Star of David then to let the Germans know who I was and that I, a Jew, had

survived their barbaric persecutions. After a few moments of silent confrontation, during which I defiantly returned the hostile stares of the anti-Semitic ferryman, he turned abruptly to attend to his business and the boat went on its way.

Unlike the hostile attitude of the ferryman, the passengers, who were mainly comprised of German females, were generally friendly. They also offered their help and advise when I questioned them about Dresden. Thus I learned that the city had almost been totally razed by Allied bombing raids, that food was extremely scarce, that the population was starving, and that the passengers on the boat had been out in the country to barter and forage for food. Although pre-warned as to what to expect, I was not prepared for the scene that unfolded before my eyes when I entered Dresden.

What had once been one of Germany's cultural icons, the city of Dresden was now a wasteland of seemingly endless piles of rubble. Although uninhabitable by any standards, some people still managed to live in those ruins. Just as shocking as the sight of the devastated city was the all-pervading and nauseating stench of decomposing human bodies that were still buried under the rubble. Only the vast number of rats, who were feeding on the rotting flesh of the corpses, seemed to prosper in this dismal environment.

Led by one of the female passengers I had met on the boat, I went to the office of Dresden's new administration, which was now staffed with former enemies of the Nazi regime, some of whom had been imprisoned in concentration camps. After I was cordially greeted by them and addressed as "comrade," they issued a multi-lingual certificate to me, which appealed to the Allied forces to permit free passage and travel. I also received a small amount of money and coupons for food, served in a nearby soup kitchen.

Since my helpful native guide was in dire need of the latter, more so than I was at that time, I shared my food rations with her.

After one night at a refugee shelter, I decided to move on and went to a railway station from which some trains were still operating. With the help of my new identity certificate from the Dresden Mayor's office, I was able to board a train in the evening that was destined for Berlin.

Being in one of the last wagons of the train, that were crowded with persons of various nationalities, I had no idea who the other passengers of the train were until it came abruptly to a halt in the midst of an open field. When I went outside to see what was

happening and get some fresh air, I noticed that most of the other passengers who exited from their compartments were, in fact, Soviet soldiers.

After learning from the conductor that we would have a layover due to a mechanical problem with the locomotive, I approached a Soviet officer nearby and asked him in Russian whether he could give me a light for my cigarette. While he obligingly lit my cigarette with his, the officer asked, "Who are you?"

"A Jew," I answered.

After a moment of silence during which the officer just stared at me, he smiled broadly, shook my hand and said, "So am I." Then he inquired, "Where are you from?"

"From Berlin," I replied.

"Oh, Berlin," said the officer who seemed to be familiar with it. "Is that where you are going now?"

"Yes," I confirmed.

"Why are you going back there?" he inquired.

"To look for my mother. She was deported by the Germans and I am trying to find her," I explained.

After another moment of silence during which my brethren's face expressed his compassionate feelings, he said, "I like to know more about you and what happened to you and your family. Where are you staying right now?"

"In one of the last compartments," I said, while I pointed to it.

"Go and get your belongings," said the officer. "You can stay with me. I share a compartment with my boss, a general. But he isn't there right now and probably won't return until much later. Meanwhile we can talk and have something to eat. I have plenty of food for both of us."

When I told him that I didn't have anything else than what I was wearing, the sympathetic officer put his arms around my shoulder and led me to his compartment.

Although somewhat familiar with the ranks of Soviet officers, I wasn't sure about that of my Jewish brethren who turned out to be a colonel. I also learned from him that he and the general were on their way to Karlshorst, where the general would assume the command of the Soviet forces stationed in Germany. Being a Berliner suburb formerly known for its horse races, it was now the location of the Soviet's administration headquarters.

After indulging in some of the good food the officer spread out

on the table, we lit our cigarettes and began to talk. Since he asked many questions and wanted to know about my past, it was actually I who did most of the talking. While some of our conversations were in Russian, we also did so in Yiddish occasionally, which the officer surprisingly well understood.

He listened intently to what I told him about our life in Berlin and that of the Jews in our area. About the pervasive anti-Semitism that was so deeply rooted in the vast majority of the German people; about the Nazis and their ever more restrictive and punitive edicts, and the vicious hate propaganda against us; about the forced labor, the starvation rations and the degradation and brutalities we endured. When I told him about the deportations of Jews to unknown destinations in the east, the officer, who had quietly listened thus far, suddenly said, "I know where they were sent and what happened to them. I have been to Auschwitz and to some of the other camps."

"Auschwitz?" I inquired. "What was that?"

"You don't know?" asked the officer.

"No," I replied. "I have never heard of Auschwitz. Where is it located?"

"Auschwitz was a huge German concentration camp in western Poland," explained the officer.

When I inquired, "What happened there?" my Russian brethren, whose eyes began to turn moist. Visibly overcome with emotions, he said, "The Germans killed over a million of our people there."

Shocked about his revelation, it also came as a terrible blow to my hope that my mother might still be alive. Although I had learned from Mottek that Treblinka had been an extermination camp, I was not yet aware that other such death camps existed. Stunned and profoundly disheartened, I sat there quietly for some time, as also did the officer, until I was able to continue our conversation.

When I told him about my friendship with the Ukrainian, Ivan Bauga, and described how I lived there under an assumed identity as a Catholic and eventually obtained legal documents from the Nazi government in Vienna, the somber expression in the officer's face changed to that of utter amazement. He clung to every word of my report and what transpired thereafter, until I was finally liberated by Soviet troops. He shook his head in dismay, however, when I told him about my unfortunate experience with the GRU, the

Soviet military security forces and my imprisonment in Budapest.

By the time I finished telling him of my experiences and answered some more of his questions it was late at night. Since the general had not yet returned, the colonel said that I could stretch out on the bench and catch some sleep, while he would do the same on his side. When I asked what would happen when the general came and found me there, he told me not to worry about it and that he would take care of it.

It was in the middle of the night when I was suddenly awakened by noises and sound of voices in our compartment, which, I realized, was caused by the arrival of the general. When I quickly got up and wanted to leave, the general, a very tall and robust man who had apparently been informed about me by my brethren, gently pushed me back down on the seat and told me to remain there. Then, to my surprise, he stretched out right next to me and soon fell asleep.

Squeezed between the wall and the general, and unable to move, I waited until the general's snoring became increasingly louder and he was fast asleep, before I gently extricated myself from this uncomfortable position and climbed up to the empty luggage rack overhead. That is where I remained for the rest of the night and fell into a deep sleep. So deep, in fact, that I slept right through some stops at stations along the way. When I woke up, the Soviet officers were gone, but I found a small package with food and cigarettes they had left for me.

When the train arrived at its final destination, Berlin, on July 28, 1945, it ended my two and a half year absence from the city and my almost four month long odyssey through eastern and central Europe.

Polizeilicher Hilfsdienst
für die Kommandantur der Stadt Wien

Wien, I., den 21. Juni 1945
Herrengasse 13

Aufenthaltsbewilligung

Der Grü n b e r g Mauritius wohnh. Wien II., Grosse Mohrengasse 30
Die geb. 4.10.1927 Staatsbürgerschaft: staatenlos
Ist der Aufenthalt in Wien bis 27. Juli 1945 erlaubt.



Der Chef/der Fremdenbüros:

[Signature]
(Freund)

Druck: I., Grosse Mohrengasse 14

A temporary permit to stay in Vienna, Austria, issued by the Police Department for foreigners, and dated June 21, 1945.

ZENTRALERNÄHRUNGSAMT WIEN

(Gültig nur in Wien!)



Bezugsausweis N für Gemüse und Obst für Personen über 14 Jahre

Name: *Grünberg, Marie*

Anschrift: *H. G. Hochengr...*

Ob das Namensfeld ungültig!
Nicht übertragbar!
Kein Ersatz für verlorenen Schein!

Zum Warenbezug angemeldet bei:

(Geschäftstempel)

GEMUSE	GEMUSE	GEMUSE	GEMUSE	GEMUSE	GEMUSE
80	79	78	77	76	75
GEMUSE	GEMUSE	GEMUSE	GEMUSE	GEMUSE	GEMUSE
69	68	67	66	65	64
GEMUSE	GEMUSE	GEMUSE	GEMUSE	GEMUSE	GEMUSE
58	57	56	55	54	53
GEMUSE	GEMUSE	GEMUSE	GEMUSE	GEMUSE	GEMUSE
47	46	45	44	43	42
GEMUSE	GEMUSE	GEMUSE	GEMUSE	GEMUSE	GEMUSE
36	35	34	33	32	31
GEMUSE	GEMUSE	GEMUSE	GEMUSE	GEMUSE	GEMUSE
27	26	25	24	23	22
GEMUSE	GEMUSE	GEMUSE	GEMUSE	GEMUSE	GEMUSE
18	17	16	15	14	13
GEMUSE	GEMUSE	GEMUSE	GEMUSE	GEMUSE	GEMUSE
9	8	7	6	5	4

Zentralernährungsamt Wien
Juni 1943
Wien
Brotkarte täglich 450 g
für Schwerarbeiter und solche mit gesundheitlichen Tätigkeiten
Name u. Vorname: *Grünberg, Marie*
Wohnung: *H. G. Hochengr...*

Zentralernährungsamt Wien
Juni 1943
Wien
Lebensmittelschein
für Schwerarbeiter und solche mit gesundheitlichen Tätigkeiten
täglich:
Nährmittel 50 g, Fleisch 50 g,
Fett 20 g, Zucker 25 g,
sonstige:
Kaffee, Tee 50 g, Salz 400 g
Name u. Vorname: *Grünberg, Marie*
Wohnung: *H. G. Hochengr...*

These ration cards for vegetables, fruit and bread, were issued to the author in Vienna, Austria.

Nem. jud. 23 VII 48

ČESKOSLOVENSKÝ REPATRIAČNÍ ÚRAD
ЧЕХОСЛОВАЦКИЙ РЕПАТРИАЦИОННЫЙ ОРГАН
CZECHOSLOVAK REPATRIATION OFFICE

Jméno a příjmení:
 Фамилия и имя: *Quinkert Maria*
 Family name:

Den, místo narození:
 Год, месяц, день и место рождения: *1. 11. 1892. Praha*
 Date, place and country of birth:

Povolání:
 Занятие:
 Occupation:

Československá repatriace, Ing. Jan. Kovář, ředitel

Místo určení:
 Место назначения:
 Desired destination: *Wien*

Vlastnoruční podpis:
 Подпись владельца:
 Signature of holder: *Maria Quinkert*

V
B
N dne
day
date *23. VII. 1948*



Quinkert, Maria

This Registration Certificate was issued on July 23, 1945, by the Czechoslovakian Repatriation Office in Prag. The handwritten note on top, "Nem(etzki) Zid," means "German Jew."

Karantenní zachytávací stanice
zdravotně-sociální komise Zemského Výchovu
Praha II, Sokolská 54. Tel. 572-28

NEM. ZID!

Čís. 178

Lékařská zpráva.

Pan(a) Günther, Alois
nar. 8-6-1921 Buk

byl(a) u nás lékařsky vyšetřen(a) a shledán(a) bez známek infekčního onemocnění
a bez vří.

V Praze dne 22-7-1945

Podmoky, lékařská Stanice
zdravotně-sociální komise Zemského Výchovu
II, Sokolská 54. Telefon 572-28

Československý národní výbor
Podmoky
Se 45 1/8

Datum, dne 22.7. 1945.

Povolujeme této pan(a) Günther, Alois
nar. 8.6.1921
/nejednatel cestou přes Čsl. hranice/
do Polska
bylo jmenován/a písemně souhlasně
.....
Zdáváme, aby na pr. cestě žádný lékad potíže.

Varování!

Stanice zdraví a nár. bezpečnosti
Podmoky

Místní národní výbor
Podmoky

Top: This certificate from the Czechoslovakian Quarantine Office in Prag is also marked "Nem(etzki) Zid," German Jew.

Below: A travel document for the author from the Czechoslovakian authorities in the border town of Podmokly.

Удостоверение	Bescheinigung Certificate
Гр. <u>Мауритиусе Грюнберг</u>	Mr. <u>Mauritius Grünberg</u>
едет из Дрездена <u>из конц. лагеря</u>	reis. von <u>Dresden</u>
в <u>Берлин</u>	travels from <u>Berlin</u>
с <u>-</u>	to <u>-</u>
Просим разрешить проезд	with <u>-</u>
поездом, машиной или судном	Wir bitten Vorgenannten, wenn möglich, per. Fuß, mit
Дрезден <u>25.7.45</u>	Bahn, per Schiff oder Auto reisen zu lassen.
Городской совет	We beg to permit free passage of same, by railway,
	motors or ship.
	25. 7. 45
	Der Rat der Stadt Dresden
	The Lordmair of Dresden
	<i>[Signature]</i>

A Repatriation Certificate from the Mayor's office of Dresden, dated July 27, 1945. Certificates, like this one, were issued to former inmates of concentration camps and other victims of the Nazi regime.

Chapter 11

Return To Berlin

The Berlin I came back to was no longer the city I remembered. What I found, instead, was a dismal scene of rubble and mass destruction. Although a native of Berlin and thoroughly familiar with the city, through which I had extensively roamed as a youngster, I had problems finding my way now. Whole blocks of buildings had been razed in some areas, many street signs were gone, as also were some of its well-known landmarks.

While I walked toward the area of the city I had once lived in and observed the devastation all around me, I noticed that some people still managed to live in the ruins of partially destroyed houses, similar to those I had seen in Dresden.

When I arrived at the Rückerstrasse, with much trepidation and increased heart beat, the house I had lived in for most of my life was no longer there. Neither were the adjoining buildings, including that of number 1, also known as the "Ox-Head." Only five of the ten buildings in the Rückerstrasse were still standing. Among them was the state employment office.

As I stood there, dazed and beset by an eerie feeling, and stared at the gaping hole and heap of rubble that had once been my home, I suddenly heard someone calling my name. The caller, clad in a gray *Wehrmacht* uniform without insignias, looked somewhat familiar. However, I didn't recognize him until he came closer and greeted me with a big grin and enthusiastic, "Hello Max, how are you?" (Although my real name was Moritz, I was known to my friends and to all others in my former neighborhood as Max).

It was Erich Simon, the youngest son of our former house janitor, Mrs. Simon. Being dim-witted and thus often ridiculed and shunned by his German peers in our street, Erich had spent much of his time playing with the Jewish children of my age group. That changed, however, as soon as the Nazis came to power, when Erich

turned into an ardent Nazi and became very hostile toward us and other Jews in our neighborhood. While not quite as dangerous and vicious as some other German racists in our area, which included his brother, Walter, who persecuted many Jews and was rumored to work for the Gestapo, Erich, with his hateful stares and Stürmerite anti-Semitic slurs became a constant pain and nuisance to us.

As he stood there with outstretched hand and a silly grin on his face, ready to greet me as if nothing had happened in the past, my long pent-up anger welled up in me and I yelled at him, "You God-damn Nazi. How is it that you are still alive?"

Stunned by my violent reaction, Erich Simon, whose face turned ashen and exhibited much fear, froze for a split moment before he turned and quickly ran away, which was the last I ever saw of him.

When I approached some of our former German neighbors in our street, whose reception was rather cool, and asked them if they had seen my mother, their answer was negative. Unable to get any information from them, I went to look for my long-time friend, Pepi Vogel and her family, whose pub and apartment was located just around the corner in the Linienstrasse. When that also proved unsuccessful, as these buildings had also been destroyed, I decided to go to Buch, a suburb of Berlin, where Frau Schmidt and the Vogel family had some property. Once there, I was able to find their address with the help of some local people.

Pepi, who was doing some work in her garden, froze in her motion when she saw me at a distance. She thought at first it was her returning father. Only when I came closer did she recognize me. After an emotional reunion, Pepi led me into their small cottage where I was greeted by her mother, Lottchen Vogel and her grandmother, Oma Schmidt.

None of them could shed any further light on the fate of my mother, except for Lottchen. She had heard about it from one of our Christian neighbors who was present when my mother was arrested on the 27th of February 1943. When my mother pleaded with the SS man to let her go back to our apartment and fetch a handkerchief she had forgotten, he shouted, "Get up there you Jew sow," and brutally shoved her with his rifle butt onto the truck.

I also learned some more about my Ukrainian friend Ivan Bauga, and why I hadn't heard from Pepi Vogel shortly after she visited me in Vienna in the summer of 1943.

When Pepi went to see Ivan and told him that I had safely

arrived in Vienna, he was delighted, but became very distraught, when he also heard about the arrest of my mother. This was their last meeting, as Ivan disappeared soon thereafter without a word to her. Pepi had no knowledge of his whereabouts until she received a letter from him, dated June 12, 1943 from Ungvar, in the Hungarian occupied Carpatho-Ukraine. Pepi replied immediately with a letter to him, but never heard from Ivan Bauga again.

* * *

After living for years in fear and worries about her missing Jewish father, Pepi and her family were shocked when they suddenly received a letter from him in November of 1943. Written by Julius Vogel, the letter was transmitted by a Martin Bartsch from Kotzenau, in Silesia, who identified himself as being the foreman of a factory in which Vogel worked. Pepi also learned that her father was imprisoned in a nearby detention camp. The gist of the letter to his family was that they should send him some clothing, food and money via Bartsch, whom Vogel had befriended and who had agreed to pass it on to him.

When Pepi, the daughter of a Jewish father and German mother, went there, accompanied by her Christian friend, Lilo, they met with Bartsch and gave him a small cache of money and other valuables for Julius Vogel. Having learned from Bartsch the location of the camp and when the prisoners would be led back from their work, the two girls positioned themselves nearby but could not see Pepi's father when the prisoners passed, as it was too dark by then.

Pepi and her friend Lilo were about to leave when they were approached by one of the SS guard at the camp's gate. Having been attracted by the two blond and Teutonic looking girls, he invited them to have dinner with him. Pepi, who hoped to glean some information about her father, accepted his invitation and met with him at a local restaurant.

When the young SS guard, whose name was Erwin Klug, seemed to express some sympathy for the Jewish prisoners in the camp, Pepi divulged who she was. She offered him a generous monetary reward if he would help her meet her father, to which Klug agreed.

However, instead of meeting her father as Klug had promised, he betrayed them. When Pepi and Lilo appeared at the camp, they were arrested. A similar fate also befell Lottchen Vogel, Pepi's mother, when she went to the Gestapo to plead for her daughter's and

Lilo's release.

After languishing for about one year in prison and three months at the Ravensbrück concentration camp, they were finally released and inducted for the rest of the war time into forced labor.

* * *

"What are you going to do, Max?" asked Pepi on the next morning, after I had spent the night on their sofa.

"I have to go back to Berlin and see what I can find out about my mother," I answered. "Do you know where the Jewish Agency is located?"

"No, I don't," said Pepi. "But there are some committees in Berlin who take care of former concentration camp prisoners. Perhaps they know something about her. Once you have done that, what are you going to do then?" asked Pepi

"I am not sure yet," I answered.

"You could get a job with the police," suggested Pepi.

"The police? How did you get that idea?" I asked.

"Karl-Heinz Maier works there," replied Pepi.

"Karl-Heinz Maier? Who is he?" I inquired.

"Don't you know him? He used to live in the Alte Schönhauserstrasse," said Pepi

"No, I don't think I do. I recognize his name," I replied.

"Anyway," said Pepi. "He is Gitte Gora's boyfriend. You know who she is, don't you?"

"Is she the red-haired girl who used to live in the Gormanstrasse and is befriended with you and Lilo?" I asked.

"Yes, that's Gitte," confirmed Pepi. "I could ask her to talk to Karl-Heinz about you. He is a big shot at the police headquarters in the Dirksenstrasse."

"No, that's not for me," I concluded. "I don't want to wear a uniform."

"Neither does Karl-Heinz," explained the smiling Pepi. "He is with the Kriminal Polizei, the police detectives."

"Well, I might consider that," I said. "But first I have to go back to Berlin and find out what happened to my mother. Once I have done that, I will see what to do."

When I went to the registration office located in my former neighborhood, I met my old friend and classmate, Horst Heidemann. He invited me to stay with him until I found a place

for myself. Horst, who had recently married a Jewish girl from Berlin and now lived in an apartment at the public swimming pool building in the Gärtnerstrasse, was in charge of its maintenance.

Although of so-called "privileged status," because of his Aryan mother, Horst was nevertheless arrested by the Gestapo during the notorious "Factory Action," on February 27, 1943, and taken to the detention camp in the Grosse Hamburgerstrasse.

While he was held there with other Berliner Jews for transport to Auschwitz, Horst was interrogated by one of the Jewish "*Fänger*," and by Max Reschke. Having been our former tyrannical school director, with whom I had clashed many times, Reschke had been appointed as director of the detention camp and worked for the Gestapo. Only after Horst's persistent Christian mother went daily to the Gestapo and pleaded for his release, did they finally relent and let him go.

The *Fänger*, meaning catcher, was the name given to a small number of Jews who either willingly or under torture agreed to work for the Gestapo. They were promised exclusion or deferral from deportation to the extermination camps by the Gestapo, as long as they betrayed the whereabouts of fellow Jews and hunt for those still hiding in Berlin.

The most notorious and efficient "*Fänger*," who roamed the streets, café houses and other public places of Berlin, was a young Jewish couple. The man's name was Rolf Isaaksohn, while that of his female partner was Stella Kübler, nee Goldschlag. They were responsible for the arrests of large numbers of so-called Jewish "*U-Boats*," a name given to Jews who had avoided deportation and lived undercover in Berlin.

Stella, a young and attractive blonde, whose pleasing appearance belied her despicable activities, and who was feared by the remaining Jewish community, became known as "das blonde Gift," the blond poison. That was because of the dire consequences of her often unexpected and feared appearance to those whom she met. For more details on this subject, see the book "Stella," by Peter Wyden.

When I asked Horst where I could inquire about my mother, he took me to the temporary office of the Jewish Agency. There I met Heinz Galinski, a former Jewish resident of Berlin. Galinski who had survived the horrors of the Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen death camps, was now trying to take care of the few remaining Jews in Berlin who were in dire need of help.

(Once a thriving Berliner Jewish community of about 170,000 members before 1933, it had shrunk to a mere 2,000 by the end of the second World War).

"When was your mother deported?" asked Galinski when I inquired about her.

"I don't know. But she was arrested on the 27th of February, 1943," I replied.

"So, that was during the Factory Action," said Galinski, while he nodded.

"Do you know where she might have been sent?" I asked. "She was not well and I am very worried about her."

"Yes," said Galinski, who looked at me with a sympathetic expression. "I know where she was sent. I was there myself. The Jews who were arrested in the Factory Action were all deported to Auschwitz. I am very sorry, but I don't have good news for you."

"You mean to the concentration camp of Auschwitz?" I inquired.

"Yes, but Auschwitz wasn't just a concentration camp. It was an extermination camp, explained Galinski, who added, "If she hasn't come back by now, there is little hope that she survived."

Following orders from Adolf Hitler, who demanded a "*Judenrein*," cleansed of Jews Berlin, it was on this infamous date of February 27, 1943, that the Gestapo with the assistance of the SS and police conducted the so-called "*Fabrikaktion*," the factory action. They arrested about 15,000 of the remaining Jews in Berlin who still worked as forced laborers in Germany's war industry and deported them to the death camps in the east. There, most of the women, the children, the elderly and all other persons deemed unfit for hard labor were immediately put to death in the gas chambers.

Although Hitler's Propaganda Minister, Joseph Goebbels, triumphantly proclaimed Berlin as being "*Judenrein*," it wasn't entirely true, as a small number of Jews, who had been able to evade arrest, went into hiding and lived submerged as so-called "*U-Boats*." Only few of these survived, however.

As to a small number of Jewish spouses and children of mixed marriages who were also arrested in these raids, most were saved by their loyal non-Jewish wives and mothers, who demonstrated in front of the detention camp in which they had been interred, until the Gestapo released them.

Devastated by the terrible news about my mother and overcome by profound grief, I was unable to function for some time and just remained in seclusion at Horst Heidemann's place. It wasn't until I realized that my mother, whose main purpose in life had been to live and care for her children, would have wanted me to go on with my life, that I proceeded to do so. After I registered as a returned refugee from Nazi persecution and got my food ration cards, I was able to move into a small furnished town house, located in Berlin's

suburb of Alt Glienicke, that was formerly occupied by a Nazi war criminal and his family.

Once I had settled my personal affairs, I went to see Karl-Heinz Maier at the police headquarters in the Dirksenstrasse, who occupied a rather high position there. Although Maier, a self-assured and well-dressed young man of somewhat younger age than I, confirmed during our brief conversation that he had indeed lived in a street that ran parallel to ours, I could not recall having ever seen him. Had I done so, I would surely have remembered, as I had a photographic memory for persons I had seen, even if only for a brief moment.

However, neither that, nor the fact that Maier did not recognize me either mattered in this case. Having apparently been briefed about me by his girlfriend, Gitte, Maier, who thus knew about my background, was very helpful and referred me to the personnel department where I was immediately hired.

Chapter 12

When I began to work as a detective at Berlin's police headquarters in the Dirksenstrasse, on August 2, 1945, it didn't occur to me that I had chosen the most dangerous professions in post-war Berlin. But that it was.

Having been divided into four sectors, with the Soviets being in the east, the French in the north, and the Americans and British occupying the western part of the city, Berlin was a hotbed of criminal activities. Since some of the crimes were committed by Allied, mostly Soviet soldiers, who were beyond our jurisdiction, we could not arrest them. Considering also that we were prohibited to carry firearms, the odds of successful operations were thus often stacked against us.

While that should have been an intimidating factor, it wasn't to me, as my job as a detective seemed like a *Kinderspiel*, kid's play, compared to the dangers I had faced during the Hitler years. Besides being a very interesting and challenging profession, it was also an opportunity for me to search for Nazi war criminals and bring some of them to justice, who might otherwise go free.

After being assigned to the search and investigation (*Fahndung*) department at Berlin's police headquarters, I attended a short course in criminology. The course was conducted by a senior detective named, Schildt, who also acquainted us with some of the necessary bureaucratic procedures.

Schildt, a somewhat paunchy detective in his early sixties, with an apparent clean political record, whom we referred to as "Papa Schildt," became our boss and mentor. While Schildt's was essentially a desk job, I and a small group of other novice detectives soon became involved in outside activities.

At first our actions consisted mainly of raids on black market activities. Many of these were conducted in public parks, on street corners and squares, and in other parts of the city. That is where the people came to barter for food, cigarettes, coffee and other rare

commodities that were normally not available. To obtain these scarce goods, the Berliners traded whatever they still possessed after the extensive looting by the Soviet soldiers, such as jewelry, antiques and other valuables.

Men who were hooked on nicotine and didn't have anything to barter, followed smoking Allied soldiers on the street until they threw the cigarette butt away and pounced on it, while German females offered themselves for some chocolate or other scarce items to Allied soldiers. That included the much hated Russians and black Americans whom they had looked upon as *Untermenschen*, sub-humans, as recent as just a few months ago. It was amazing to see how quickly their former arrogance and German superiority complex vanished and succumbed to the powerful equalizer of hunger and deprivation.

While food, coffee and other scarce commodities were much sought-after, none was as coveted as American cigarettes. So much, in fact, that they had replaced the grossly devalued Reichsmark as the prevailing currency. Thus, transactions of scarce commodities and other valuables were often based on how many Lucky Strikes, Camels, Old Golds or Chesterfields one could get for it.

Considering that the cost of one American cigarette was about ten marks, except for the Pall-Mall brand, whose cigarettes were somewhat longer and thus more expensive, they, as well as all other scarce items were far beyond the reach of the average German family whose weekly income may have been about 40 to 50 marks.

Since these bartering activities were of necessity and rather benign nature, compared to the many more serious crimes in Berlin, and the black market supply of scarce commodities seemed to function rather well, I thought it was a waste of our time and efforts.

My opinion was ostensibly not shared by Karl-Heinz Maier, who often scheduled and directed some of these actions. Having a penchant for the theatrical, Maier usually waited until the uniformed police encircled the trapped black marketeers and the detectives arrested some of the major traders, before he made his grandiose appearance. That was the case also during one of our raids on the black market at the Rosenthaler Platz, right next to the Aschinger Restaurant.

Maier, who may have seen too many American gangster films before the war and tried to emulate Eliot Ness, came racing around the corner with an old Opel automobile, driven by one of his

assistants, from which he jumped just a split second before it came to a screeching halt. While Maier's well-timed arrival and stunt, who was fittingly clad in a leather trench coat, was indeed very impressive, it received no applause from the audience. Instead, it created a chaos during which some of the panic-stricken people dropped the forbidden black market goods on the ground and began to run in all directions, while we, the few detectives in their midst, just tried to stay out of harms way and evade the ensuing stampede.

Unlike these black market raids, that were conducted with large numbers of uniformed police and detectives from the police headquarters, we just teamed up in small groups of two or three men when we began our more serious investigative work outside. Since it was left to us to select our partners, and we did so based on our recent experience with each other, I teamed up with my colleagues, Kurt Drews and Dyonis Gänge. Being also native Berliners who had lived in the same general area as I did, their background and physical appearance differed radically from that of mine, however.

Besides being several years younger than I, Drews and Gänge were Christians and had served in the German army. Both towered over my modest 5 feet 8 inches by at least another half a foot. While the blond-haired Drews with round and freckled face, with whom I developed a close cooperation, was somewhat laid back and rational, Gänge, whose sharply profiled face, olive complexion and dark hair seemed apropos with his mythical Greek name, Dyonis, was quite eccentric at times. That is where our differences ended, however, as we meshed very well and could always rely on each other whenever we went into actions.

To compensate for the fact that we were forbidden to carry firearms, as were all Germans, which was punishable by a mandatory death sentence, we used bluff and bravado whenever we faced dangerous criminals. With Gänge's ability to speak some English, and my scant, but often sufficient knowledge of Russian, we were able to maneuver in this divided city and soon turned into an efficient investigating team. When that was noticed by our superiors, and later also by members of the Allied forces, they began to assign special cases to us.

But meanwhile, we were busy with search and arrest operations for all sorts of criminals throughout the city. To facilitate our mobility, we requisitioned impounded motor cycles, with which we sped to our destinations.

* * *

One of our actions took place at a bar located in the Kreuzberg district of Berlin, that was supposedly a hub for black market and other criminal activities. While Drews and Gänge checked the identity papers of the patrons in the bar, and I was in the midst of questioning its proprietor, a voice suddenly called out, "Max, is that you?"

When I turned toward the dimly lit corner of the room where the voice came from, a slenderly built man rose from his seat. At first I didn't know who this frail looking person was, but when he came closer, I recognized him. It was Martin Horowitz, with whom I had labored during the war on the German railroad.

After we shook hands and embraced, Martin said, "Max, why don't you stay here and have a drink with me?"

"Sorry, Martin, I can't do it right now, but I will come back when I am off duty," I promised. When I met with him soon thereafter, I learned what had happened to Martin Horowitz.

When the so-called "Factory Action" took place, on February 27, 1943, in which the last remaining Jews in Berlin were suddenly seized and deported, Martin was able to evade arrest by hiding in the apartment of a former German Communist. When it became too dangerous for him to remain there, his friend contacted a clandestine group who sent Martin to another Communist activist named, Alfred Kruschke, the owner of a small bar in the Kreuzberg district of Berlin.

While he worked there occasionally as a waiter, Martin realized, to his chagrin, that he wasn't only serving some ordinary citizens, but also several members of the Gestapo who came there often to have a few drinks. He remained undetected until he left his safe hideout one day and went to the center of city where he was recognized by someone who denounced him to the Gestapo. After being arrested and deported to Auschwitz, Martin, who was somehow able to survive the hellish conditions there, returned to Berlin.

"It is tough to live here after all I went through," said Martin, after he finished his story, "but what can I do?"

"Why don't you try to emigrate?" I suggested.

"It's too late for me," said Martin.

"Why is that?" I inquired.

"Because I am too sick now," said Martin, who added with some

bitterness in his voice, "Even if I wanted to emigrate, I couldn't get a visa."

That was indeed so. Aside of the fact that the restrictive emigration policies of the western countries were still in place, they would not issue a visa to a sick person. Thus forced to remain in Germany and live among our former enemies, it was a very difficult situation for Martin, myself and many other survivors.

Moreover, I never knew what the German person I met or dealt with had done during the war, and whether he or she had been involved in the heinous crimes against my people and others.

One of the strange phenomenon I encountered in post-war Berlin was the fact that it was rather difficult to find anyone who admitted to have been a Nazi. Those who couldn't deny it because their names were found on Nazi membership lists and other records, which were now in Allied's hands, often denigrated their position in the Nazi party, or claimed that they had been forced to join for economic or other mundane reasons.

No one seemed to recall that 90% of the Germans who had voted in a plebiscite for Hitler's policy of aggression, terror and anti-Semitism, also supported him enthusiastically throughout the war. Besides conveniently forgetting their dark and dismal past, they often portrayed the Nazis as being an alien clique of people, other than German.

The truth of the matter was that the vast majority of the Germans were extremely anti-Semitic and enthusiastic Nazis. They ranged from the lowly worker to the middle-class Bürgers, the high echelon of commerce and academics, and not least, to the majority of the Christian clergy. Whether card-carrying members or not, didn't matter.

* * *

Although not specifically assigned to search for Nazi criminals, I was always on the lookout for them during the course of our investigations. Whenever I found members of the murderous SS or SD forces, who were known to have committed atrocities during the war, I turned them over to the Soviet authorities rather than to the Western Allies, as the latter soon lost interest in prosecuting the multitudes of German war criminals, many of whom were still at large.

As to the Germans, whose judicial system was still staffed with

former Nazis and dreaded Peoples Court judges, who had sent many opponents of the Nazi regime to their death, they could not be trusted to prosecute their own compatriots.

That became evident when I informed the German authorities of a former Nazi whom I personally knew, and who had boasted in my presence that he had turned Jewish refugees over to the Gestapo in occupied France. When no actions were taken by them, I decided to turn this matter over to the Soviet command post, located at the Unter den Linden Boulevard, who immediately arrested that person.

After I became familiar with the commanding officer, I contacted him also when I discovered two top secret German documents during one of our searches at the apartment of a major black market operator. Besides finding large quantities of illegally obtained commodities, I also discovered several secret Nazi documents.

When I interrogated him about the latter, the man claimed that he had found them on the street after the battle over Berlin ended. Whereas possible, I doubted the veracity of his statement. However, a background check failed to reveal anything that may have connected him to any Nazi organizations.

Each one of these multi-page and bound documents, whose cover page read, "*Streng Geheim*," strictly secret, contained the names, addresses, phone numbers, and other personal data of foreign statesmen, plus other important personalities and organizations they belonged to. According to the instructions preceding the list of names, these persons were to be immediately seized upon occupation of their country and taken into custody for further "treatment," an often used Nazi acronym for "execution." While one of these documents was designated for England, the other one was for the Soviet Union.

When I read the names of the intended victims, some of whom were those of well-known government officials, industrialists, Jewish community and Zionist leaders, I realized that they had all been selected for elimination by the German Nazis.

At first I didn't know what to do with these documents and did, in fact, ponder whether I should destroy them, as they could still cause considerable harm if they fell into the wrong hands. But then I thought it may be better if I turned them over to the intended victims.

With that in mind I went first to the British authorities in

Berlin. Being apparently unaware of its existence, they were very surprised and grateful when I handed them the secret document. While having a conversation with a rather young officer who spoke fluently German and may, in fact, have been a Jewish refugee from Germany, I mentioned to him that my sister was living in London. However, I was unable to give him her current address, as it was unknown to me. When I asked him whether he could help to locate her, the young officer said, "Don't worry. We will find her and let her know where you are."

As it turned out, my sister, Celia, found me before they could locate her. She saw my name on the daily lists of refugees posted by the British Red Cross, who received them from the International branch, the very same I had registered with in Bucharest, Romania. She did, however, receive a letter of commendation from the British government, who expressed their gratitude for services performed by her brother. When I suddenly got a letter from her I was delighted and we stayed in touch via mail from that date on.

My next visit was to the major Soviet command post, located on the Unter den Linden Boulevard, near the Brandenburg Gate, Berlin's most famous landmark. When I told the commanding officer that I had an important document and handed it to him, he called another officer who was able to read German.

After he scanned through the document and advised his superior of its contents, the officer turned to me and asked, "Where did you find this document?"

"I confiscated it," I replied.

"From whom?" inquired the officer.

"From a German black market dealer," I explained.

"Was he from the Gestapo?" asked the officer.

"No, I don't think so," I replied. "I checked his background and it was clean."

"Do you know what this is?" asked the officer while he pointed at the document.

"Yes," I answered, "I do."

After a short pause, during which he conferred with his superior, the officer turned toward me again and inquired, "What else did you find there?"

When I answered, "There was another document similar to this one, but it was meant for England and contained a list of English names," his eyes lit up.

"Do you have it with you?" he asked

"No," I said, "I don't."

"Why don't you bring it to us," suggested the officer, "We will reward you for it."

"I can't do that," I answered. "I turned it over to the British authorities."

"Ah, what a shame," muttered the Officer.

"Why are you interested in that list?" I inquired.

"We would just like to take a look at it," said the officer evasively. "If you find anything like that again, bring it first to us."

When I said, "I don't think I can do that," and added, "I haven't shown your document to the British either," the officer, who conveyed all this to his superior, finally gave up on this subject.

After they expressed their gratitude for bringing this important document to them, they also offered their assistance whenever I needed it, which turned out to be great help to me.

That notwithstanding, I was angry at myself when I left the Soviet command post for revealing the existence of the other secret document. Particularly so since carelessness was a luxury I rarely indulged in. Also upsetting to me was the fact that the Soviet's had shown such a keen interest in the document with the names and relevant data of British personalities, which indicated that all was not nearly as well with the Allies as I had thought.

This was soon confirmed when the other bloody dictator, Josef Stalin, lowered the "Iron Curtain" across the East-European countries and engaged in an aggressive policy against his former western Allies, which shattered my naive belief that a new era of peace and justice was about to begin.



A post-war picture of the author. Circa 1947-1948.



A post-war picture of Pepi Vogel

Chapter 13

Except for the episode with the secret German documents, my contacts with members of the British or American forces were limited, as I didn't speak English. We did some occasional detective work for the Americans, however. When they needed our assistance, we were contacted by Captain Fred Meyer, who spoke fluently German and turned out to be a former Berliner.

The problem was that the American women's quarters, located in the Berliner Zehlendorf district, had repeatedly been burglarized at night and the women were afraid to sleep there. Although the Americans had posted armed guards at the entrances and corridors of the building, they had not yet caught the thief. Since he was able to evade the guards and continued to enter the women's sleeping quarters, we deduced that he might do so from the outside windows or balconies, and that we were, in fact, dealing with a cat burglar.

With that in mind, Drews, Gänge and I hid at various spots outside the building. To stay warm during the very moist and cold autumn nights, we took a few occasional sips from a bottle of whiskey, Captain Meyer had generously supplied for this special mission.

While the first two nights went by without an incident, our vigil was rewarded on the third one when we suddenly spotted a shadowy figure near the building. When he put his hands on one of the outside drain pipes and began to climb, we quickly left our hideouts and grabbed him.

The suspect, a small and wiry man in his late thirties was clad in a black gym suit. He also wore rubber soled sneakers, which explained why we did not hear his foot steps when he approached the building.

Although he protested and claimed to be innocent, our suspicion that he was the elusive cat burglar was confirmed when we took him to the police headquarters and interrogated him. When we asked what he was doing at that building, the man claimed that he had just

been out for a night walk. That was a ridiculous assertion. Not only was it well past midnight, but his home was located in the eastern part of the city, several miles from the American women's quarters in the western sector of Berlin. When we checked his background and learned that he had once been an acrobat in a circus, which explained his nimbleness and ability to climb, we knew we had our man and turned him over to the authorities for prosecution.

* * *

Unlike this rather benign episode and other occasional services for the "*Ammies*," as the Americans were called in post-war Germany, our actions in behalf of the Soviets were often fraught with great danger. So much, in fact, that they gave us permission to carry firearms for some of these special assignments. One of these took place in an area between the Anhalter railway station and the Potsdamer Platz, where the railway tracks had been destroyed and the travelers needed to walk through an unlit and devastated area toward the next available transport.

When we were briefed at the police headquarters about this mission, we learned that a number of civilians had been killed there, whose throats had been slit and whose belongings had been stolen. Since this action was ordered by the Soviet Central Command, and firearms were issued to us, we suspected that the murderers were Russian nationals. That was all we knew, however, as these crimes were usually committed at night and no positive identification from witnesses were available. At least not to us.

Having nothing else to go on, Drews, Gänge and I decided that we would each patrol a separate but parallel street of the crime area and set our self up as bait. If anyone of us would be approached by suspicious looking persons, or attacked, we would blow a whistle and alert the others to come to our aid. The fact that this was a very dangerous and possibly suicidal mission never entered our minds, as we were still the intrepid "young lions."

That notwithstanding, my nerves were taut and I was beset by an eerie feeling when I walked through one of the unlit streets late at night, lined with nothing but rubble and ruins on both sides. I was, in fact, the only person in that street and the only audible sounds that reverberated from the ruins were those of my foot steps. While one of my hands held the police whistle, the other was around the grip of a large and very heavy Luger military pistol that almost tore a hole

in my winter coat pocket.

I had covered about half of the street when I suddenly spotted two shadowy figures that emerged from one of the ruins a short distance ahead of me. When they split up and began to approach me from both sides, I slowed down while my grip around the pistol tightened.

When they came closer and one of them called out to me in broken German, "*Uri, Du hast Uri?*" do you have a watch? an often used phrase by marauding Soviet soldiers, and I saw the reflection of a blade in his hand, I quickly drew my pistol and shouted in Russian, "*Rucky wjerch,*" raise your hands.

Ostensibly stunned by the fact that I spoke Russian and by the added persuasion of the large Luger pistol pointed at them, the two men froze in their position and followed my order.

"Who are they?" asked Kurt Drews who quickly appeared at the scene with Gänge after I blew the police whistle.

"I am not sure yet but they are probably Russians," I surmised, which the two teenage suspects, who were clad in much too large and badly fitting civilian clothes, confirmed when I questioned them.

"What are we going to do with them?" asked Drews.

"I will take them to the Soviet command post Unter den Linden," I answered. When Drews and Gänge wanted to come with me, I suggested that they stay there and search the partially destroyed building instead from which the two suspects had emerged.

That, as it turned out, was not a wise decision and could have had dire consequences for me. Whenever the two suspects cried out for help on the way, I was stopped by Soviet officers who demanded to know what was going on. Only when I explained to them that the two Russian youngsters were hooligans and suspected murderers, and that I was taking them to the Soviet command post, did they eventually let us pass. What saved me was the fact that my Russian during these short conversations was good enough to pass as a compatriot. Had they known that I was a German detective, I may not have come out of this alive.

When we arrived at the Soviet command post Unter den Linden and the two suspects were interrogated and searched, they had, besides stolen valuables, such as watches and jewelry, also a pair of cut-throat razors in their pockets, which was consistent with the fact that the murdered victims all had their throats slit.

What followed was a swift and brutal punishment. After being severely beaten and repeatedly kicked in their ribs by the enraged commanding officer, the two youngsters confessed that they belonged to a gang of Russian teenagers who had followed the Red Army all the way to Berlin. They also revealed that the gang was led by a Russian sergeant named, Ivan, whose last name they didn't know.

Although I never learned his last name either, the Soviet commandant seemed to be aware of this Ivan. He told me that Ivan was a deserter from the Soviet army and a very dangerous criminal. He also asked that I contact him in the event that Ivan turned up and to use extreme caution, as he was armed and would kill without hesitation. Little did I know that "Ivan the Terrible," as I referred to him, would suddenly appear at the least likely place I expected and become my nemesis.

Being on the late shift, I was still at home on the next day when the phone rang and a familiar voice said tersely, "Maurice, don't come into headquarters today," which was that of my colleague, Kurt Drews.

When I asked, "Why not?" Drews told me that a burly Russian soldier, armed with an automatic rifle, had come to the police headquarters and demanded to see the detective who arrested two young Russians last night. When nobody volunteered that information, he entered the office of Karl-Heinz Maier, from which he soon returned and shouted, "Where is Gruenberg?"

Since no one stepped forward, he demanded to see the identification cards of all present and finally took one of the men with him, whose last name, though also Gruenberg, was that of a clerk in the administration department.

"Why didn't somebody stop him?" I asked.

"We couldn't," replied Drews. "He threatened to shoot if anybody made a move. Besides, none of us was armed."

When I inquired, "How did he get my name?"

Drews answered, "That is obvious, isn't it? He didn't know your name before he went into Maier's office, but did so when he came out."

"What a *Schweinerei*, a piggish thing," I exclaimed, "To be betrayed by one of our own members."

"Yeah, it sure is," agreed Drews. "We are all very upset about it. I wouldn't be surprised if Maier actually works for the Russians."

"What happened after I took the two suspects to the Soviet command post?" I inquired.

"It was incredible," said Drews. "When we searched the ruins from which the two suspects had emerged, we found such a huge cache of stolen goods these thugs had amassed there, that we needed two trucks to haul it away."

"No wonder that 'Ivan the Terrible' is so upset," I concluded. "Not only has he lost two members of his murderous gang, but also all the loot."

"Who is Ivan the Terrible?" inquired Drews.

"From your description, it was the Russian soldier who came to the police headquarters," I explained, after which I told him what I had learned from the Soviet commander.

"I have another message for you from Papa Schildt," said Drews, before we ended our conversation. "He says that you should stay away from headquarters for a few days, as that Ivan might come looking for you again when he realizes that he has the wrong person."

"Okay," I acknowledged, "but call me immediately if Ivan shows up again, so that I can notify the Soviet commander about it."

While I was off from work, I began to ponder my situation and whether it was really important for me to continue my job with the German police. Considering that my namesake had been abducted from the police headquarters and that several other colleagues had also disappeared without a trace, mainly in the Soviet sector, my activity as a detective had become extremely dangerous, way beyond the norm. Having also been betrayed by one of our own and pursued by "Ivan the Terrible," I came to the conclusion that it wasn't worth putting my life on the line, as I had often done.

I was about to quit my job, when another incident took place, just a few days later, that changed my mind temporarily and delayed my departure from the police department.

This time it was my colleague, Kurt Drews, who got into trouble with one of the numerous and dangerous Russian gangs that plagued the city. Drews took part in another special police action at a Berliner railway station, ordered by the Soviets, from which large shipments of foods and other scarce commodities had been hijacked by armed Russian soldiers. When they shot at him, he returned their fire and wounded one of them. Since the police headquarters was located in the Soviet sector of Berlin, where Drews would be an easy target and exposed to the gangster's revenge, as it happened in my

case, we were both transferred to a western precinct in the British sector of Berlin.

After a few months of routine detective work, during which most of my time was taken up with boring paper work rather than outside activities, I quit my job with the police department and left in March of 1946.

* * *

Without a job and not sure what to do, I just drifted aimlessly for a while until I met a Russian captain who was stationed in the area where I lived. That came about when Soviet soldiers, who hid out in the forest at night through which the passengers had to walk from the S-Bahn railway station toward their homes, routinely robbed some of the late arrivals and raped the females.

While walking along the forest trail one night, I was approached by two of these armed thugs. When they asked the familiar question in broken German, "*Uri, wieviel Uri?*" what time is it? and I just laughed and replied in Russian, "why do you speak German to me, comrade?" they just waved me on and let me pass. But that was not what they did with those who followed, as I heard distant screams of terror behind me when I emerged from the dark forest.

When I went to the Soviet command post in my area to report this situation and see if something could be done about it, I met Captain Sarnoff, who turned out to be Jewish. Since I was the only brethren he had met thus far in Berlin, he became quite attached to me and visited me at my home. Besides inquiring about my past, he also displayed a keen interest in Jewish traditions, which, as he indicated, were almost totally lacking in his country.

Although we soon became good friends, his face exhibited great fear when I mentioned the subject of politics, or questioned him about conditions in the Soviet Union, which he refused to discuss. While most of our conversations were in Russian, we occasionally spoke Yiddish, which he only partially understood.

I also met Captain Sarnoff's wife, a *heimish*, folksy looking Jewish woman whom I invited to celebrate the Jewish holidays with me. Since the captain's visits were often accompanied by some food, it was of great help to me, as Berlin was in the midst of a terrible famine. That was followed by one of the severest winters on record during which thousands of inhabitants perished of exposure and starvation.

Along with my new Russian friend also came an opportunity to earn some money. That came about when Captain Sarnoff asked whether I knew of a source for good quality leather, suitable for trench coats, which were as much in vogue with the Soviet officers, as they had been with their German counter-parts. Besides wanting one of these coats for himself, Captain Sarnoff also needed additional leather for other officers, some of whom were his superiors.

Since this scarce material was not readily available and I had no connections to anyone in the black market, I went to see my former colleague, Martin Horowitz, at the Kruschke bar in Kreuzberg. Having always been a resourceful person with many contacts, Martin also knew a person who dealt in these scarce goods and referred me to him.

Once I had found the source for the desired leather, I was able to supply my Russian friend and the other Soviet officers with it. They, in turn, paid for the leather with scarce commodities, such as food, which I used in trade for other desirable goods, or converted into money. When the supply of the scarce leather dried up and this lucrative bartering deal came to an end, I came upon another business opportunity.

When Martin Horowitz passed away of the tuberculosis he had been infected with in the Auschwitz camp, I remained in contact with his friend, Alfred Kruschke, a brawny, blond haired man in his early thirties, who was the proprietor of the bar. Besides being a curious mixture of a Communist and Capitalist, the multi-faceted Kruschke was also connected to the Berliner underworld. While that would have raised a flag of caution, it didn't turn into a problem for me. Having introduced him to Pepi's friend, Lilo, whom he soon married, Kruschke never crossed me in my dealings with him.

While being at Kruschke's bar, which became a hub for my business activities, I met a couple of young men from East-Germany, who had come to Berlin to sell a few accordions. When they inquired whether I could find a buyer for them, and I said that I would, it turned into another lucrative business for me.

The fact that I had never dealt in accordions was not a problem, as they were very scarce and in great demand by dealers of musical instruments in West-Berlin.

At first it was just an occasional deal. My suppliers were, in fact, workers at an East-German accordion factory, whose entire production went to the Soviet Union as part of the imposed

reparations. But when they realized that I could sell more of these instruments than they had, they also bought whatever they could from their colleagues who also assembled them in their homes.

The irony was that many of these accordions, originally destined for shipment to the Soviets, though no longer gratis and in a roundabout way, wound up in the Soviet Union. That came to light when I visited one of my retail accounts in West-Berlin, and observed a Soviet officer who bought one of the very accordions I had recently sold to the dealer. When I asked the dealer whether the "*Russkies*," as the Soviets were generally called, were his main customers for these accordions, he confirmed, with a big grin, that it was indeed so.

* * *

Although I could have earned large sums of money during those times, I wasn't interested in amassing material wealth and worked only sporadically, just enough to support myself. While that wasn't a problem for me, I had a terrible time coming to grips with others I was deeply troubled with.

Most of all was the pain about the loss of my mother who had perished in the death camp of Auschwitz, and the persistent feeling of guilt, because I had been unable to save her. Though well aware of the prevailing realities during the Nazi era, and that I would probably have perished also had I stayed with her, it didn't change anything, as such logic, derived from the mind, was subordinated to the profound grief I felt in my heart.

I had also become very disappointed with the policies of the Western Allies, who soon began to lose interest in the prosecution of Nazi criminals. Although their so-called "denazification" program of former Nazis had been a sham, as the chances of turning the bigoted Nazis into tolerant people were as slim, as turning a leopard into a house cat, it had at least been an honest effort and a warning to them. But when the hostilities between the Soviets and the western Allies increased, the latter began to court their former German enemy, whom they now needed as a counter-balance.

That did not include the survivors of Nazi persecution, however, many of whom were still kept in retention camps where they languished due to the continuing restrictive immigration policies of the western countries. The irony was, that it became easier for Nazi war criminals and their collaborators to emigrate, than it was for

their victims.

Since this was not what I had envisioned after the end of the Nazi era and the terrible war, I became very disillusioned. Though highly touted, the so-called "*Real-Politik*," also became a "white-wash" for many Germans, who used it opportunely to bury their dismal past. Being busy with rebuilding their destroyed country and its economy, the Germans had coined the convenient and often heard phrase, "Let's not burden our children with the past." By keeping their children in the dark about the atrocities many of them had participated in, they also avoided the embarrassing question, "What did you do during the war, Dad?"

Disenchanted with the world, and particularly so with the old one, all I wanted was to leave Germany as expeditiously as possible. But that was as yet not possible as the former emigration barriers to America were still in place.

When I went to register with the HIAS, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, which was engaged in sponsoring and obtaining visas for displaced Jewish persons to the United States, and they told me that I could not emigrate from the Soviet sector in Berlin, where I still lived, I moved to the American sector of Kreuzberg, in December of 1947.

Chapter 14

While on my way to my new home in the Tempelhof area, I met my former neighbor, Erich Schmidt and his brother whom I hadn't seen for several years. After being incarcerated by the Nazis because of his Communist party membership, Erich, who spent most of the Hitler years in prison and at hard labor, had survived, as also did his family who now lived in the Soviet sector. Since Erich and his family had been the only Christians in our building who had shown any sympathy toward us, and we were both survivors of the Nazi era, he spoke very candidly when I asked, "What are you doing in this area, Erich?"

"The cell leader of our (Communist) party sent us to the western sector to see what is going on there," replied Erich

"What are they looking for?" I inquired.

"I have no idea, Max" (my former name), answered the somewhat chagrined Erich, "but they keep on sending us back here."

"Do they give you specific targets to gather information from?" I queried.

"No, they don't," replied Erich. "They just tell us to go to certain areas and keep our eyes and ears open."

"Well, what have you seen and heard so far?" I inquired.

"Very little," said Erich, "except that it seems to be better on this side than on ours."

"Are you going to tell that to your leaders?" I asked.

"No, of course not," replied Erich. "This is not what they want to hear."

"Why did you come to this area? Was it because of the Tempelhof airport down the block from here?" I asked.

"Yes, that's it. We just came to have a look at it," answered Erich.

"And?" I inquired, while I looked at Erich expectantly.

"Nothing," said Erich, while he shrugged.

"So, you guys are really a couple of spies, aren't you?" I

concluded with some humor, as they didn't look the part and were just a pair of duped amateurs.

"I guess you can call it that," confirmed Erich with a slight chuckle, while his brother just nodded.

Being familiar with the conditions in the eastern sector, I was aware that the East-German Communists had adopted the Soviet police system. They recruited or coerced many of their citizens into spying for them, which included that they also inform on their friends and own family members. Since I had known Erich and his family all my life, and we had gone through very tough times during the Nazi era, I didn't think I had anything to fear from him.

It was another matter with the Allied intelligence officers and their Soviet counterparts, who patronized some of the very same hangouts I did. One of those was the Hermitage, a well-known night club and cabaret in West-Berlin. Although clad in mufti, which they thought would hide their foreign origin, the intelligence officers who came there to glean some information or recruit spies were rather conspicuous to the trained eyes and ears of a former detective.

That was the case also when I was approached by one of these recruiters at the Hermitage one night, whom I immediately recognized as being of Russian origin by his mannerism and distinct accent. When he, after some trivial conversation, began to inquire about my personal life, I decided to play along for a while to see what he was up to.

Having introduced himself as Peter, which was probably an alias, he finally zeroed in on the crucial question, "What is your occupation, Maurice?" which was one of several names I used.

"I work for the administration," I answered.

"Which administration?" inquired Peter.

"The one here in the West," I replied.

"You mean the German one?" asked Peter.

"Yes," I confirmed.

"What is your job there?" queried Peter.

"Well, just administrative work," I said evasively.

"What kind of administrative work?" inquired the persistent Peter

"Sorry, but I can't talk about that," I answered.

Having aroused his interest, Peter, who probably thought he had found a good prospect, changed the tack of our conversation by volunteering some (surely bogus) information about himself. He

told me that he was an international businessman with many connections and access to rare commodities. He also said that he could use somebody like me to assist him and offered to provide me with some of these commodities and money.

I played along for a while until he asked whether I would work for him. When I just smiled and suddenly said to him in Russian that I wasn't interested, his eyes widened while he looked at me with an amazed expression, before he turned and disappeared.

Besides being a watering hole for international spies, the Hermitage was also a meeting place for other dubious characters. Among them was Walter Schmidt, the part-owner of the club and one of the preeminent black marketeers in Berlin.

Schmidt, a short, chubbily built and boisterous man, who lavishly spent large sums of money on women and liquor, earned his fortunes by running trucks loaded with tobacco and other rare commodities through the Soviet occupied eastern zone to Berlin. While some of the bribed East-German or Soviet border guards let Schmidt's trucks pass, others, who were not corruptible, became the target of his speeding vehicles that crashed through their barriers, followed by a hail of gun fire. Although he didn't resort to violence in his dealings, Schmidt, who had spent some time in jail for his black market activities was, in fact, the German equivalent of an American bootlegger.

Another meeting place of spies and black market dealers was a restaurant run by the Soviet Intourist organization in the eastern sector of Berlin. However, since the fine Russian and continental cuisine served there had to be paid for with American dollars or other hard currencies, I only went there occasionally. Unlike the black marketeers at the Hermitage, who were mainly German and comparatively small fry in this field, except for Walter Schmidt, the ones at the Intourist restaurant were of international origin and big movers of rare commodities.

Among them were a few East-European brethren with whom I conducted some business. Although they teased me occasionally for being a "*Yecke*," a humorous and sometimes mocking Yiddish name for a German Jew, they were also very cordial and extended some credit to me. After I had dealt with them for some time and we became befriended, they began to confide in me. Thus I learned that some of the black market goods like coffee, chocolates and other rare commodities actually came from Switzerland.

Even more revealing was the conversation I had with one of the dealers in gold and precious stones, when I asked him, "Who buys all that gold?"

"The Vatican," answered the dealer.

"The Vatican?" I queried.

"Yes," he confirmed.

"Come on," I said. "You are kidding, aren't you? The Vatican is in Rome, Italy, not in Switzerland."

"I know that," acknowledged the dealer. "However, they do much of their business through agents in Switzerland."

"Why is the Vatican interested in gold?" I inquired.

"I guess because it's a good investment for them," replied the dealer.

"Do they know where the gold is coming from?" I asked.

"I'm sure they do," said the dealer.

Although I never considered the black market activities in Germany as criminal or unethical, as they did not deprive the population of their rations, but rather provided them with otherwise unavailable commodities, I was taken aback by the fact that the Vatican was involved. It just didn't seem proper for a religious institution to profit from the needs of the people. However, having been the target of their anti-Semitic diatribes, and considering the dismal record of the Vatican during and after the Nazi era, their conduct did not surprise me.

After they quickly allied themselves with the Catholic Hitler, only six months after he came to power, by signing a Concordat with the brutal German Nazi regime, the Vatican, under the leadership of Pope Pius XII, maintained an icy silence throughout the war while the genocide of the Jewish people was in progress.

Instead of aiding the pitiful remnants of survivors from the Nazi death camps, members of the Vatican facilitated the escape of thousands of Nazis instead, by providing them with false identities, travel documents and passages to Latin American and other countries. Among them were mass-murderers and other war criminals, including the notorious architect of the Nazi's "final Solution," Adolf Eichmann. For more details on this sordid subject, see the book "Unholy Trinity" by Mark Aarons and John Loftus.

* * *

Unable to emigrate and stranded in Germany, a country that had caused much damage, pain and terrible memories, I continued to drift from one day to another while I waited to hear from the

HIAS. To ease some of my anguish about my mother's fate, and that caused by the recurring nightmares from which I woke up at night, I began to drink. Not on a regular basis, as I felt very ill after the consumption of much alcohol, but rather went on occasional binges.

Besides having no desire to acquire material wealth, I also had no interest in lasting relationships with my frequently changing female acquaintances. Whenever I wanted female companionship for my one-night affairs, I went to some bars, like the Grotta Azzura, or other such places near the Kurfürstendamm. If that didn't work out, I didn't pursue it or make any dates with the girls I met there, but rather let it go. The only exception was a somewhat longer lasting and stormy relationship with a beautiful Polish girl.

* * *

Compared to the heretofore dreary post-war time, 1948 was an eventful year for Germany, and particularly so for Berlin. Unable to scare the Western Allied forces out of Berlin by non-cooperation and obstruction of previous agreements, the Soviets resorted to actual force by blocking all roads and transportation in and out of the city, which was surrounded by Soviet occupied territory.

To thwart Stalin's intent to starve the Berliners into submission, the western Allies began to support the population with food and other basic commodities via an "Airlift," during which Allied air planes landed at intervals of just a few minutes at the Berliner Tempelhof airport.

Although accompanied by a constant loud roar of engine noises, particularly so in my neighborhood, as I lived only a few blocks from the airport, it was welcomed by the Berliners, who were thus assured that they had not been abandoned by the western nations.

Since the "Airlift" could only supply relatively small quantities of basic commodities, the economic conditions in the western zone of Berlin remained as dismal as they had been, due to the Soviet blockade of the city.

When the almost worthless German currency, the Reichsmark, was replaced in 1948 by the new Deutsche Mark, which was pegged at four marks to one U.S. dollar, and backed by it, the economy of West-Germany made a rapid, almost overnight recovery. It was like a miracle when the stores were suddenly stocked with an

abundance of goods and many heretofore unavailable delicacies and luxury items. That did not include the western sector of Berlin, however, due to the continuing blockade by the Soviets of the city.

It wasn't until Stalin realized that the Western Allies were determined to stay in West-Berlin, that he lifted the blockade of the city on May 12, 1949.

With a temporary visa from the British political office in Berlin, and a transit visa from the very Dutch government, which had turned me over to the Nazi security forces when I fled from Germany and crossed their border in the fall of 1938, shortly after the Kristallnacht, I was finally able to travel to London, England and visit my sister, Celia.

Although happy that we had survived the Nazi terror, our long awaited and joyous reunion was subdued by the fact that we had lost our mother. Celia, whose apartment had been destroyed by German bombing raids on London, and who now lived in a rented room, was as deeply hurt by the loss of our mother, as I was, and could never come to terms with it. She broke into tears at the slightest reference to our mother and couldn't bear to look at the family pictures she had of her, which she gave to me instead.

Having scheduled her vacation to coincide with my arrival, Celia traveled with me to the summer resort in Brighton, where we stayed with one of her friends. Although England had won the war, I was surprised to learn that its economic condition was almost as dismal as that of Germany, and that ration cards were required for most necessities.

That notwithstanding, Celia, who must have sacrificed some of her own needs, had saved some money, as well as cigarettes, chocolates and other luxurious surprises for me. With that I was able to have a fairly normal and carefree life for a short time. While Celia went out for some errands, I spent time on the long Brighton Beach pier, that was furnished with all types of pleasure providing entertainment, one would normally find at amusement parks or other such places. I also roamed about London and visited its many landmarks and other interesting places when we returned.

My visit to England, which was to have lasted about a month, came to an unscheduled and early end when I received a letter from the HIAS, that had been forwarded to me by my German landlady, in which they requested that I come to their office. Thinking that

the time had come for my emigration to the United States, I cut my visit short and returned to Berlin via an airplane, as land travel was not yet possible due to the Soviet's blockade of the city.

Although my hopes for emigration quickly dissipated when the person at HIAS informed me that they only needed additional information, it was rekindled when he also told me that I would soon be able to emigrate to the United States, and that it was only a question of time until a visa could be obtained for me.

While I waited in Berlin for my visa to the United States, which I thought would soon be forthcoming, I made no plans to start a new career and continued my former activities. With some of my barter deals, and a few "CARE" packages I occasionally received from the American Refugee Aid Organization, I was able to get by during these difficult economic times.

My rather dreary and uneventful existence would probably have continued until I was ready to emigrate, had it not been for the fact that fate, who disguised herself in the form of a BMW automobile, apparently wanted to test my ability to survive one more time.

Chapter 15

The BMW episode began at Kruschke's bar during the summer of 1949. I was in the midst of a conversation with Gerhard Lach, one of the frequent patrons and occasional trading partner of Walter Schmidt, whose girlfriend lived in the very same building, when a young man walked in who was a former classmate of him. After Lach introduced us and we had a drink together, Heinz, as his classmate's first name turned out to be, came to the point of his visit, whether Lach would be interested to buy a BMW automobile. When Heinz told him that the car belonged to one of his friends who wanted to sell it and quoted the price for it, which I thought was rather low for such a scarce and desirable automobile, Lach agreed to buy it.

After his classmate left, who had promised to deliver the car within a few days, Lach, who mainly dealt in American cigarettes, and other such scarce commodities, turned to me and said, "I don't want the car for myself. I just want to sell it. Do you know somebody who might want to buy it?"

Although I had never dealt in automobiles either, I was aware of their scarcity, and answered, "I'm not sure, but I can contact a friend of mine who might be interested."

"Good," said Lach. "I will leave it in your hands. If you can sell the car, I will pay you a good commission for it."

Spurred on by that, I contacted Leo Orgonek, a friend of mine with whom I had done some business. When I told him about the automobile and quoted the price Lach wanted for it, Leo said that he would buy it providing that the car was in good condition. Glad to have found a buyer for it, Lach and I waited anxiously for the arrival of the BMW automobile.

When more than just a few days passed and we didn't hear from Heinz, I began to wonder whether this wasn't just another *Luftgeschäft*, a deal full of air, as such transactions that never materialized were called. I was about to give up on this deal and

write it off as bad experience, when I received a telephone call from Lach. He told me that his friend, Heinz, and the BMW automobile were on the way and that I should come to the Kruschke bar.

Soon after my arrival at the bar, Heinz showed up with the automobile, an attractive looking BMW convertible. After Lach paid Heinz, who soon left, I got on the phone and informed Leo Organek that the car had arrived. When Leo came, he took a short ride around the block, paid Lach the agreed upon price and drove away. Lach, in turn, gave me the promised commission and a small sum also to Kruschke, which was customary for some deals made and concluded in his bar. Having thus been a profitable and fair deal for all of us, I was delighted that all had gone so well.

My elation didn't last very long, however, as I got a telephone call from Leo Organek just two days later. "Have you read the morning newspaper, Max?" asked the frantic sounding Leo.

When I replied, with an ominous sense of impending danger, "No, I haven't," and inquired, "what is the problem?"

Leo said, "We are in big trouble. I resold the BMW to another person. He has just called me and demanded that I take it back."

"But why, Leo? What's wrong with the car?" I inquired.

"Everything," said the excited Leo. "The Russians are searching for this car. It's a terrible mess. Get the newspaper. It's all in there. And call me right back."

When I got the morning news paper, I saw an article that reported a missing BMW convertible automobile from the Soviet occupation forces in the east sector of Berlin. Besides describing its color and serial number, the article stated that the Soviet authorities were also searching for its German driver who had disappeared.

When I called Leo and asked whether he had checked the serial number, he confirmed that it was identical with the number on the car. I told him that I would meet with Lach and see that he gets his money back. Lach, who had as yet not heard about the problem and was shocked when I told him what I had just learned, said that he would get on the way and meet with me at Kruschke's bar.

We were in a gloomy mood when we sat down to discuss the problem. Not only had this easy deal turned sour, but it might also have dangerous consequences for us. Particularly so since the car was Soviet property and they might come after us. After I returned the money that Lach had given me, he promised that Leo would get his money back as soon as he returned the car.

When I told Leo about it, he felt somewhat relieved and said that he would do so as soon as possible. Meanwhile, it was Lach who was left holding the bag, at least until he located his former classmate, Heinz. When Lach said that he intended to return the car to him and get his money back, I questioned the likelihood of it.

While we sat there, and Lach contemplated what his next move should be, Kruschke, who was busy at the bar counter, suddenly turned up the volume of the radio when a news flash interrupted the ongoing program. When the reporter announced a new development in the BMW car case, and that the body of the missing German driver had been found, who had been shot, Lach's face turned ashen, while I was absolutely stunned by it. "What are we going to do now?" asked Lach when he recovered from the initial shock.

"There is only one thing to do," I said. "We have to report it to the police."

"The police? Why?" asked Lach.

"Because this is no longer a case of theft, which is bad enough, but of homicide," I pointed out.

"But we had nothing to do with that," argued Lach. "It is that damn Heinz's fault, not ours."

"Of course," I agreed. "But that is only known to us and not to the police at this time. Besides, they need to be informed about Heinz and what transpired, before they reach the wrong conclusion and come after us."

"Well, I'm not going to do it," said Lach, who was weary of the police due to his record of arrests because of black market dealings.

"You don't have to," I said. "I will take care of it."

Having lost any contacts with my former colleagues at Berlin's police headquarters, which had been divided between East and West-Berlin, I went instead to the nearest police precinct in my district of Kreuzberg. When I told the detective in charge all I knew about the BMW case, including mine and Lach's involvement, he recorded it, thanked me for the information and said that he would pass it on to the respective department.

When I returned to Kruschke's bar, I told Lach that he needn't worry about the police right now, but that he should try instead to find his former classmate, Heinz, who was apparently the culprit in this crime.

While we sat there and tossed various ideas around, including the speculation whether Heinz may, in fact, have been the killer, the

door to the bar suddenly opened with a loud crack and a number of policemen stormed into the place, followed by several detectives. When they asked if Gruenberg and Lach was present, and we identified ourselves, they shackled our hands and took us away.

Since I had voluntarily reported our involvement in this case to my police precinct and offered my assistance to apprehend the person responsible for this terrible crime, I was stunned and upset about the manner in which we were arrested. When I pointed that out to the interrogating officer, he was unmoved by it. He also claimed to have no record of my appearance or witness report at the Kreuzberg precinct. Thus, after they interrogated Lach and me, we were transferred to the notorious prison in Moabit, where also former opponents of the Nazi regime had been held before they were executed.

Although a bad omen for us, I looked forward to our preliminary hearing. I felt confident that we would be released once the judge realized that ours had only been a peripheral involvement in this case and that we had nothing to do with the murder or theft of the automobile. When I related my thoughts to the gloomy looking Lach, whose mother became very ill after his arrest, he just shook his head and said, "I hope you are right."

As it turned out, to my and Lach's dismay, I was dead wrong. When we appeared before the judge and the prosecutor presented the case to him, he accused us of being the main culprits of this crime. The judge, who exhibited only scant interest in our testimony, ruled that we should be held in prison for suspicion of murder.

Based on that ruling, we were no longer taken back to the section where Lach and I had shared a cell. Instead, they took us separately to another, more secure part of the prison, reserved for dangerous criminals, where I was locked into a cell with two other inmates.

When I asked them what they were in prison for, the older man, who was ostensibly a professional criminal, claimed that he had been falsely accused of having committed murder during a robbery. The other, a young man in his late twenties, said that he had killed his mother in law. While I had no sympathy for the devious thug, a short and ugly creature, whom I gave a sound beating when he stole my food while I was away, being interrogated, I felt some compassion for the young man when he told me his story.

According to that, his mother in law, who lived with him and his wife in a small apartment, often made deriding remarks and

humiliated him because of his inability to earn more money. When she kept on berating him, his patience snapped one day and he struck her with a small ax he was making kindling wood with and killed her.

Having done so in the heat of the moment and turned himself into the police where he confessed to his deed, I thought that it was a case of manslaughter, rather than premeditated murder as the prosecution claimed. Since he had no attorney or anyone else to defend him, I helped to map out his defense and coached him along those lines.

Meanwhile, the BMW case had turned into an international conflict between the Soviets and their former western Allies. The Soviets, in whose territory the crime had been committed and who were the rightful owners of the BMW automobile, demanded that we should be turned over to them, while the western Allies, who wanted to use us as pawns in the this new "Cold War" game, refused to comply.

Although the Soviet's position was obviously the correct one in this case, I hoped that the western Allies would stand firm and win this political tug-of-war. If not, I feared that the Soviets would either execute us or send us to one of their terrible Gulags in Siberia.

When I saw Lach during one of our brief exercise outings at the prison yard, during which conversations between the inmates were forbidden, and I slipped into the line behind him, he whispered to me that he had little hope of getting out of this dilemma and feared that we would be turned over to the Soviets.

Our worst fears became reality when the Western Allies finally gave in and we were taken to the German police headquarters in the east-sector of Berlin, the very one I had once worked at as a detective, where we were locked into separate cells. That was followed by lengthy interrogations by a German detective and a Soviet officer, who spoke a respectable German. After I testified about my involvement in this case, and pointed out that neither I nor Lach had anything to do with the theft of the automobile and the murder of its driver, I was led into another room where I was confronted with a lineup of six men.

When the Soviet officer asked whether I knew anybody in this lineup, I quickly pointed to Heinz, whom I immediately recognized. Heinz, who avoided looking at me, stared instead in another direction, while he said with a stony looking face, "I have

never met this man before."

Having learned how to cope with dangerous situations and deal with a variety of people during my clandestine existence and activities as a detective, I asked the Soviet officer, after we returned to his office, whether he would permit me to be alone with Heinz for a few minutes. When he inquired what the purpose was, and I said that I might persuade him to confess, he agreed. Thus, I was taken back to the adjacent room where Heinz was still being held.

At first I just sat there silently across the table from Heinz, and waited for him to speak. However, when he didn't for some time and just stared past me, I asked in a calm voice, "You know who I am, don't you, Heinz?"

It wasn't until I repeated my question that Heinz finally looked at me and acknowledged my presence with a slight nod, after which he replied in a low voice, "Of course I do."

"Why didn't you admit that before?" I inquired.

"Because I am afraid that the Russians are going to kill me if they find out what I have done," said Heinz.

"But Heinz," I said, "the fact that you are here and have been identified by me, and surely also by Gerhard, clearly indicates that you are their prime suspect."

When Heinz didn't react to that, I continued, "Look what you have gotten us into. You know that we had nothing to do with the theft or the murder. Yet we can't be released until this case is resolved. Meanwhile, Gerhard's mother is very ill. He may not be able to see her before she dies. Why don't you at least tell the truth about us so that we can get out of jail?"

"Because if I do the Russians will kill me," said Heinz, who broke down and sobbed, "I don't want to die."

"No, of course not," I sympathized with him. "But your best chance to avoid that is to come forward and confess to whatever you have done. The Russians might, in fact, be more lenient if you do. So why don't you go ahead and do it?"

"You really think I should?" asked Heinz.

"I really do," I answered. "I used to be a police detective and have some experience in such matters," I assured him.

"Can you put in a good word for me with the Russian officer?" inquired Heinz.

"I will do whatever I can," I promised.

"Okay," said Heinz after he collected himself and wiped the

tears from his eyes. "I will tell them what happened."

When I reported my conversation with Heinz to the Russian officer, and that he was ready to confess, he and the German detective went into the adjacent room where Heinz was being held, while I was taken to my cell.

On the very next day, the German detective in charge of the case informed me that all charges against us had been dropped and that I was free to leave. Although it was evident that Heinz had a major part in the theft of the car and possibly also in the murder, I was not aware of the details until I read a front-page article in a West-Berlin newspaper which described the heinous crime Heinz had committed.

Heinz, who was employed by the Soviets as a driver, had a girlfriend with an insatiable appetite for material things and luxury items. Since his meager salary was insufficient to provide her with such scarce and expensive items, and he feared to lose her, Heinz decided to steal one of the Soviet owned automobiles and convert it into money. To deflect any suspicion from himself, Heinz asked another German driver for the Soviets, a young married man with two children, who was also his best friend and whose home he had often visited, to give him a ride with the BMW car he was driving.

Claiming that he was meeting somebody for a cigarette deal at a nearby forest, Heinz promised to give a pack of cigarettes to his friend for his help. When they entered the forest, Heinz, who told his friend to stop, shot him at close range in the head and dragged his body out of the car and into a nearby bush.

After he cleaned some of the blood off the drivers seat, Heinz went to the nearest telephone booth where he called Gerhard Lach, and informed him that he and the BMW was on the way. Once he had the money for the car, Heinz took his girlfriend on a shopping spree and spent it all on her.

While the western newspaper also reported that Lach and I had been cleared of all charges against us and that we had been released, the East-German Communist newspaper, *Neues Deutschland*, New Germany, stated in a front page article that I, Maurice Gruenberg, was the leader of a murderous gang who had committed this crime. When I called the editor of this newspaper and asked him to print a retraction of this untrue and defamatory article, he said that he had no intentions of doing so and hung up. So much for the objectivity and fairness of the Communist press.

* * *

Finally, in November of 1949, my long wait was over when I received the wonderful news from the HIAS, that a visa to enter the United States of America had been obtained for me. When I learned that my destination would be Minneapolis, Minnesota, I wondered where that might be, as I had never heard of it. Although I was familiar with the names of most major American cities, Minneapolis wasn't one of them. That was not a problem, however, as I soon learned all I needed to know about it from an encyclopedia.

In essence, it didn't make any difference to me what city I would be sent to, as long as it was in America, as all I wanted was to leave my dismal past behind, say "good riddance" to the bigoted Germans and start a new life.

My first step toward that goal came when I was sent to the embarkation center of Camp Grohn. Being administered by the International Refugee Organization located, it was located at the outskirts of the northern port city of Bremerhaven.

After staying at the camp for about a two weeks, I and many other refugees of differing European nationalities and ethnicities, some of whom had been kept in holding camps for years after the war ended, boarded the US Liberty ship, General J. M. McRae, and got on the way to America, which to me was the equivalent of "The Promised Land."

When one of the officers asked for volunteers on the ship and I stepped forward, I was assigned to work in the mess hall. That was a stroke of luck, as I had never seen such a variety of delicious and plentiful food as was served to the poor refugees on this transport ship. My appreciation for the generosity of the United States Navy was apparently shared also by the other passengers who came to the mess hall, as I saw many happy faces among them.

That changed rather quickly, however, when we crossed the English Channel and the ship began to pitch and roll in the rough sea. Although the exact numbers were unknown to me, I estimate that the vast majority of the passengers were sea-sick by the next day and remained so for the duration of the voyage.

This rather high estimate was confirmed, when only few of the passengers showed up for their meals again. Of those who were brave enough to try and actually made it to the chow line, only few

remained, as the odor of the food, combined with the constant smell of oil on the ship, added to their already unbearable misery. Although I felt a bit queasy in my stomach throughout the voyage, I was able to weather the storm and fight off being sea-sick by staying busy at all times. I don't know whether this is an antidote for anyone else, but it certainly worked for me.

We actually arrived at the port of New York on the night of December 16th. Since we could not dock, the ship anchored outside the harbor. Knowing that we were in American waters and only hours away from debarking, I couldn't sleep that night, as there was much commotion on the ship while we packed our few things and waited for the next morning.

When the ship began to move and I went on deck to look for the Statue of Liberty, it was too late as we had apparently passed it. What I did see instead, was the gigantic ocean liner, the Queen Mary, which had docked right next to us and towered over the Liberty transport ship like a sky scraper.

And then, on the 17th day of December, 1949, a date I will never forget, as it was one of my most memorable and happiest days, I finally set foot in the country I always longed to be, *"America, Land Of The Free!"*



The author, on the Kurfürstendamm, is on his way to his office at the police precinct in West-Berlin. 1946.



Erich Schmidt on the left, and his brother on a spying trip to West-Berlin. This picture was taken by the author in 1948, a few houses from where he lived. The large building in the distant background is that of the Berliner Tempelhof airport, where the Allied transport planes landed during the "Air-Lift."

HEBREW IMMIGRANT AID SOCIETY		IMMIGRATION STATUS															
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This registration certificate was issued to the author by the HIAS, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society. The sponsor for immigration to the United States was the Jewish Family Service in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Chapter 16

America..."The New World"

Compared to my turbulent past, which always remained a reference point and enabled me to view everything in its proper perspective, my life in America was rather easy and pleasant. When I arrived in Minneapolis, Minnesota as a displaced person, without money or knowledge of the English language, I was graciously received by a female delegation of the local Jewish community. Besides extending their hospitality and warm greetings on this late and chilly December day of 1949, they provided me also with some money and a rented room with a Polish refugee family who had preceded me there.

The first week in this wonderful new, but also strange environment, was mainly taken up by meetings with local representatives and other refugees at the Jewish Community Center. I also met local members who came to view the newly arrived "Greenhorns." Some of them invited me to their homes for dinner. While it was surely well-meant and appreciated by me, it also coincided with the fact that some of these families had unmarried daughters whose ages, varying from the mid to late twenties, were then considered hopelessly passé.

Though not inclined to change the status of their daughters, I enjoyed being among my people and felt very much at home amidst the warm milieu of a Jewish family. Our conversations, conducted by necessity in Yiddish, revealed the startling fact that my local brethren, who were prewar immigrants or first generation Americans, seemed to have little knowledge or understanding about the severity of conditions and tragic events that had taken place in Europe. I do, in fact, still remember a conversation I had with one of them, which, while not verbatim, went along the following lines.

After my host inquired about my past and of my family, which I reluctantly and very briefly described, as it was still too difficult

and painful for me to talk about it, he said, "Things must have been bad over there."

"Yes," I confirmed, "They were bad."

"You may not know this," said my host, while he accentuated his next words, "But we also suffered here."

Startled by his revelation, as I was not aware of it, I asked, "You did?"

"Oh yeah," said my host, "we had many shortages here also."

"Shortages?" I inquired, "what kind of shortages?"

"Well, for instance, gasoline was rationed. So also was sugar and beef. It got so bad that we had to eat mainly chickens instead," said my host.

Dumbfounded by his statement and unsure whether I understood what he had said, I repeated, "So bad that you had to eat chickens?"

"Yes," confirmed my host while he shook himself in disgust. "I couldn't look at chickens for quite some time."

While my brethren continued to list other "hardships" he and his family had endured during the war, I just sat there quietly and made no comments, as I didn't know what to say.

Should I tell him that even at the best of times, for my family and others of moderate means in Germany, chickens were rather expensive and made rare appearances on our dinner table? How could I explain to my host who had just finished an extensive meal what it meant to be hungry and starve for long periods, or about the many other deprivations we had endured during the Nazi era. Realizing the apparent futility of such an undertaking, I refrained from doing so.

Although initially taken aback by his lack of awareness, which I also found among other brethren I met in the United States, including some prewar German Jewish refugees, I could find no other plausible explanation for this strange phenomenon, except that suffering may be a matter of relative perception. Or was it perhaps that they were just plain indifferent and ignorant of what we had endured?

Besides some local people, I also met Günter Matzdorff at the Jewish Community Center, who had also been a member of the boys choir at the Lützowstrasse synagogue in Berlin, from 1933-1936. Having emigrated to Shanghai, China before the outbreak of the Second World War, Matzdorff remained there until he was able to enter the United States in 1948. When Jewish refugees began to

arrive in Minneapolis, Matzdorff, who was active at the Jewish Community Center, assisted them by driving the new arrivals around the city .

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After a week of socializing and a few quick night school lessons in English, I decided that it was time to go to work and support myself. Having no qualifications other than being a savvy survivor, which was not a profession I could earn a living from, the Jewish Agency found a job for me in a hat factory.

With my wages being 75 cents an hour, which amounted to about \$24 a week after taxes, I was able to live rather well. After paying for room and board, I had enough left for all other necessities, and was also soon able to buy a new gabardine storm coat with a mouton collar. Besides being very much in style, it was also a necessity to shield me from the ice-cold Minnesota winter.

Lured by some of the wonderful things one could own in this new country with just a small down-payment, a system I had never heard of before, I also bought a 1941 Oldsmobile. My choice of this car was influenced by the used car dealer, who assured me that it was a great buy and that his wife drove the very same model. What he didn't tell me was that the car, which used almost as much oil as it did gasoline, was, in fact, nearly a total wreck.

Being unattached and adventurous, I began to explore the downtown area of Minneapolis and soon discovered a bar that turned out to be a mecca for Jazz enthusiasts. Since its outward appearance did not differ from most other beer joints in that area, I almost passed it by, had it not been for the sweet sounds of Dixieland music that emanated from it. Although the object of curious stares at first, as I was the only white person in that place, except for the owner who was also the bar keeper, that began to change when I became a frequent visitor there.

It was during my excursions to the downtown area, on Hennepin, one of the major thoroughfares of that city and center of entertainment, with its movie houses, bars, pool halls and other establishments, that I also met Percy Villa.

I had actually noticed Villa several times while I was playing pool in one of the pubs located on Hennepin. Coming usually late in the evening, Villa had a short conversation with the bar keeper, before he went into a small adjacent room where he began to pound

on a typewriter. That was about the extent of it and I had no idea who he was until he came over to watch me playing pool one day and we began to converse. When Villa learned that I was a Jewish refugee from Europe, he became very interested.

"Where are you from, Moish?" asked Villa, who always used this Americanized Yiddish substitute for my name, Morris.

"From Berlin, Germany," I replied.

"So, you are a German Jew?" questioned Villa.

"No, Percy, I am not," I answered, after which I explained my situation which he readily understood.

"So what are you doing here?" inquired Villa. "Do you have a job?"

"Yes, I work in a hat factory, not far from here," I replied.

"What do you do there?" asked Villa.

"I am a blocker," I answered.

"A blocker? What is that?" inquired Villa.

"Well, I stretch baseball caps onto wooden blocks of differing sizes that are shaped like human heads and place them into a steam box. When I take them out and let them cool, they are of the proper shape and ready to be worn," I explained.

"That sounds like pretty hard work," said Villa.

"No, not really. It's nothing compared to what I had to do where I came from," I replied with a little chuckle.

"Are you making a living?" inquired Villa.

"Oh yes, I am," I assured him.

"Come along with me, Moish, I have to take care of some business," suggested Villa. "We can talk some more on the way."

While in the car with him, I learned that Villa's business was to collect coins from pinball and other vending machines he had placed at a number of bars and other venues. Wherever we went, Villa was cordially greeted by the proprietors and by some rather shady looking characters with whom he conversed. By the time he had finished making his rounds, I had learned much about Percy Villa. It also solved the mystery what he was doing in that pub on Hennepin and his repetitive work on the typewriter.

Percy Villa (an assumed author's alias whose real name I don't recall) was the son of poor Jewish immigrants from Russia, who had come to America at a very early age. After a short career as a professional prize fighter and various other activities, Villa, who had a flair for writing, became a syndicated columnist for

Minnesota newspapers and other Midwestern publications. Besides his vending machine business, Villa was also the owner of the pub on Hennepin.

Considering his past and present activities, his physical appearance and the people he dealt with, the short but robustly built, middle-aged Villa, with his curly dark hair, whose face still had a few scars from his former pugilistic profession, was, in fact, the embodiment of a Damon Runyon character.

In spite of his achievements, Percy Villa, like many other Jewish immigrants, who had long suffered from discrimination and poverty, had a penchant for recognition and publicity. Whenever an article appeared about him, or one in which he was just briefly mentioned, the beaming Villa gave me a copy of it while he proudly said, "Hey, Moish, take a look at this."

* * *

When I decided to leave the nice, but also rather slow life in Minneapolis and go to New York, and I told Villa about it, he was very disappointed. So also was my boss and my landlord who tried to persuade me to stay. My mind was made up, however, and I left for New York on the 18th of May 1951. Once there, I moved in with my friends from Berlin, Leo and Martel Organek, who had meanwhile emigrated to the United States and lived in a rental apartment in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn.

Having learned to be a blocker, I soon found work in a hat factory and earned a good salary. That is where I also met an old friend of my family, Max Morgenbesser, who worked in a garment factory located in the very same building. After he was deported from Berlin, Germany to Poland, during the so-called "Polish Action," in October of 1938, Max Morgenbesser and his family, who followed him there, were able to obtain their long awaited visa and emigrated to the United States.

When I went to their small and rather poorly furnished apartment for dinner and a nostalgic reunion with his family, I learned that Max Morgenbesser, who once had a good business and lived rather well in Berlin, now eked out a living as a machine operator. Morgenbesser also revealed that the factory had laid off some workers recently, but not him, as he was one of the fastest operators in the factory.

"Only the Big Moishe is faster than I. But he is getting older and

I will soon overtake him," boasted Morgenbesser, who was apparently not aware that he had already aged well beyond his years since I saw him last.

As I sat there and listened to his rather modest and sad aspirations, it occurred to me that I might face a similar dismal future if I remained where I was. When I went back to the hat factory and looked at the workers there, some of whom were of advanced age and always in fear of being replaced by a younger and faster person, I decided to change the present course I was on. Although I had to start from scratch and at a much lower wage, I quit my job at the hat factory and began to work instead in the order department of Jane Irwill, a manufacturer of fine quality knit wear, which I hoped would be the beginning of a better career.

The fact that I had to get by with less money was no problem, as one could still live inexpensively in New York. For lunch I usually went to Romeo's pasta place on Broadway in Manhattan, near Times Square, where I got a huge portion of freshly cooked spaghetti with meat sauce, plus bread and butter, and all the Parmesan cheese I wanted for 25 cents, while a cup of coffee cost just a nickel.

When I left Jane Irwill for a better paying job, it was with a ladies belt manufacturer, whose owner, Mr. Steinberg, was a very kind man and a compatriot of mine. I also moved into a rented room at the nearby Riverside Drive in the Washington Heights section of Manhattan, which was then inhabited by many prewar German Jewish immigrants.

* * *

With my new language rapidly improving until it developed into a fairly adequate English, I began to explore some other sections of Manhattan. That led me eventually to Greenwich Village. Intrigued by its Bohemian ambiance, the "Art in the Street" exhibitions, and other attractions, I soon became a frequent visitor there. I also went to some small cafés, where I mingled and conversed with many aspiring, as well as established members of the arts. While some of the people I met were indeed bonafide artists, others were of the pseudo type.

I also visited the Village Vanguard cabaret, a well-known launching pad for the career of aspiring entertainers and great jazz bands, and a large beer hall, where I listened to jam sessions and my

favorite Dixieland and jazz music. Another hangout of mine was the Birdland on Broadway, where I listened to the great jazz duo of Parker and Dizzy Gillespie with his odd-looking horn.

My excursions were fortunately not confined only to Greenwich Village, as I met my wife at another place. That came about after I had one of my usual dialogs with Marty, an American friend I had met in the Village.

Our dialog, which preceded that in the film "Marty," with Ernest Borgnine, usually went along similar lines. "What do you want to do tonight, Marty?"

"I don't know," said Marty. "What do you want to do?"

"I don't know," I replied. "How about going dancing," I suggested, after we had thoroughly exhausted that repetitious "I don't know" routine.

"Dancing?" inquired Marty. "Where? At the Roseland on Times Square?"

"No, Marty," I said, "I know another place in the Yorkville section. It is called Rhineland. They have a good band that not only plays the customary 'um-papa,' but also swing music and other modern tunes."

"Okay lets go." said Marty, who was not only a very good-natured fellow and easy to get along with, but also had a car that came in handy for our roving around the city.

We had barely settled in at the Rhineland café when I spotted a girl I knew and went over to greet her. She, in turn, introduced me to the other girls at her table who were all students at a beautician school. One of them was Sidonie.

While we danced, I learned that Sidonie was not only very sweet and charming, but also a Jewish refugee from Munich, Germany. Moreover, she lived in a rented room just around the corner from where I did. Being drawn to her like a magnet, we danced all night together. Before we parted, I asked her for a date and for her telephone number.

When I called her on the day we were to meet, and it turned out that I had the wrong number, I was disappointed. That didn't alter our course, however, which had apparently been charted. I met Sidonie on that very same hot and muggy summer day at a nearby grocery store on Broadway where she had gone to buy a slice of water melon.

After many more dates and a short, but delightful and romantic

courtship, we got married on February 27, 1954, which also coincided with the fact that a small apartment in Washington Heights became available to us.

Having been divided from a small one bedroom apartment by a greedy landlord, it was so tiny that our bed took up the entire space of the bedroom. The kitchen with its narrow cabinets, small fold-out wall table and old refrigerator with a compressor on top, fit for Lilliputians, barely accommodated two persons. If a third person wanted to enter the kitchen, one had to leave first.

After paying "key money," which was an accepted practice during the apartment shortage in New York, we had very little left for anything else. But that never posed a problem for us, as we weren't only exceedingly happy, but also very appreciative of the fact that it was a lot more than we had before. With the earnings from my job and that of Sidonie's, who had meanwhile gotten her beautician license and worked at a nearby beauty parlor, we managed quite well. Every item we acquired, whether an inexpensive kitchen utensil from Woolworth, or another more costly purchase was a joyous event for us.

When our son Gary was born, in 1955, and we could barely squeeze his crib into our place, we found a larger apartment near the Riverdale section of New York.

It was shortly thereafter when I was approached by another refugee whom I knew from Minneapolis, who offered me a partnership in a store he wanted to buy. The catch was that I needed several thousand dollars for the down-payment which I didn't have. Since the store promised to be a lucrative business, I approached someone I knew who said that he would lend me the money. After I signed a promissory note, I quit my job and was ready to close the deal when the lender decided to back out at the very last moment.

Left without an income and a family to take care of, we went through some very lean times until I found another job, at the showroom of Majestic, an importer of German made Gründig Hi-Fi sets on 57th Street in Manhattan.

At first, my job of demonstrating these new stereo Hi-Fi sets to our visitors was a pleasant one. I worked in a nice environment with interesting products and met a number of celebrities there, including one of my favorite Jazz musicians, Louis (Sachmo) Armstrong. But that began to change when I met Leonard Ashbach, the flamboyant owner of the firm who occasionally arrived there

with much fanfare in his chauffeur driven Rolls Royce, accompanied by his entourage.

Ashbach, who always needed money to support his lavish lifestyle and often failed to pay his salesmen in the field and some of his suppliers, told me to sell the Hi-Fi sets to any visitor to the showroom. When I appraised him of the fact that they consisted mainly of persons who had been sent there by his retail accounts to view our products, Ashbach said, "Screw them. This is not a museum. You sell them right here."

Since it was his business and not mine, I wasn't going to argue with him about it. I could have lived with that situation for a while, had it not been for the fact that some of the people in Ashbach's entourage, who were of dubious character, also became a nuisance to me. Most bothersome was one of the many shady females, a brunette woman in her early thirties whom Ashbach consorted with.

Besides operating a ring of prostitutes from the showroom, she was also a snotty bitch who had no respect or consideration for anyone. That included the manager of the showroom whom she ordered around like a little boy. While the manager, a somewhat crude and elderly man, who had once been a bodyguard for Ashbach, meekly followed her orders, I had no intentions to do so.

When she said to me one day, "Hey you. Go out and bring me a sandwich and a cup of coffee," and I told her to get off her ass and get it herself, it was the last time she bothered me again. However, being unhappy and frustrated about this terrible ambiance, I began to look for another job, which I eventually found as a salesman in a Sunset appliance store, located at the Yonkers shopping center.

* * *

Although a part-time job that only paid commissions, and I had to take three different busses to get to the store, I took my chances and began to work there. With the knowledge of electronics I had acquired at my last job, and a crash-course in major appliances, it didn't take very long for me to adapt to this heretofore unknown business.

When that was noticed by the store manager and he offered me a full-time job, my income began to improve. So much, in fact, that I decided to buy a new Renault Dauphin, a relatively inexpensive French sub-compact car with a rear engine that reminded me of its early forerunner, the Italian Fiat "Toppolino."

After I applied for a loan at a small dealership on Broadway, its proprietor, a well-groomed young man, who looked more like an ivy league graduate than a car dealer, notified me to pick up the new automobile. When I arrived at the dealership and was ushered into his office, the seat behind the desk was occupied by another well-dressed young man. While he was checking the books, the proprietor stood attentively nearby like a little school boy answering questions.

When I, after signing several documents, became the proud owner of this wonderful new little car, I asked the proprietor about its warranty and service. Before he could answer, the other young man at the desk, with whom I have had a short conversation when he heard my foreign accent and inquired about my origin, said reassuringly, "Don't worry about it. If something goes wrong with your car and you don't get satisfactory service, just call me." With that he handed me his business card.

While I don't remember his first name, I clearly recall that his last one was "Genovese." When I later questioned the purported "owner" of the car dealership, who was ostensibly a front-man, whether his "associate" was related to Vito Genovese, the notorious "*capo di capo*," boss of bosses of the New York Mafia, he nodded and said, "He is his son."

Remembering the incident and what he looked like, I was amazed when I saw "The Godfather" film, as Al Pacino's superb portrayal of him, as Michael Corleone, was as close in looks and demeanor as one could get to the real junior Genovese.

Chapter 17

Throughout our residence in New York City, I always played tennis. At first it was at a public court on Riverside Drive. However, since the neglected court's surface was full of cracks and embedded pebbles, one had to be more than just a tennis player, but also an acrobat to cope with all the crazy bounces. That improved measurably when I discovered a nice tennis complex located in a public park, just a few blocks north of Dykeman Street in uptown Manhattan. While my wife went with our son to the adjacent playground, I and a group of other aficionados played tennis there on weekends.

While at least eight or more fellows always showed up at the courts, my group consisted only of four. What we had in common, besides our love for the sport of tennis, was that we were all spirited individuals, at about the same age, of modest means and at the very dawn of our careers.

The fact that we came from differing backgrounds was never a problem. On the contrary. We had a wonderful time and added some spice to our competitions with the occasional infusion of funny Jewish, Italian and Irish expressions.

We actually played all year around. When the city took the nets down for the winter and closed the gates to the courts, we climbed over the fence and replaced it with a net we had bought. After brushing the snow off the court, we were ready to play. Though ice-cold at times and we could barely hold on to our racquets, Patrick, one of my playing partners, had a remedy for that.

Whenever we changed sides we took a small swig of whiskey from the flask that Patrick always carried in his back pocket or tennis bag. By the time we got to the end of the match, we rarely knew, nor cared what the score was.

Although I don't know where they are today, I know what became of my former tennis partners after we left New York. Maurice Weinstein, a slightly balding fellow who lived across from

the tennis courts became a successful stock broker.

I didn't know what happened to Patrick, whose image is still deeply etched in my mind, with his rosy cheeks and mischievous twinkle in his deep blue eyes, until I went to San Juan, Puerto Rico for a manufacturers product meeting in the mid 1960s. When I went to the bar for a drink, at the El San Juan Hotel, there was Patrick.

Dressed in immaculate white tennis attire, and accompanied by two pretty young ladies, Patrick was leisurely lounging there. That is when I learned that Patrick had found his Shangri-La. Besides being the resident tennis pro at the El San Juan Hotel, where he mingled with the guests, Patrick, who taught some of the beautiful young ladies how to play the game, and who knows what else, also had free access to the bar and to all the whiskey he could drink.

Lastly there was Larry (Lawrence) Noto, the fourth member of our group, with his long, somewhat disheveled hair, who looked at the world through a pair of very thick eye glasses. While we, his playing partners, were mainly clad in tennis attire, Larry, who appeared to be of even more modest means than we were, always wore black gym shorts, a multi-color striped shirt and a pair of non-matching dress socks.

Larry, whom success had ignored so far in the field of the performing arts, was a part-time actor, an agent and an aspiring producer. None of these activities had worked out for him, however. He struggled to eke out a living for his wife, a petite brunette woman, and his two small children who often accompanied him to the park. But that did not discourage Larry who kept on trying and always had some irons in the fire. That included a new play he had found and was trying to produce. When he suggested that I invest in it, I declined, as I didn't have any extra money.

Would I have done so if I had the money? Considering Larry's poor success record in his profession, which incidentally matched that of his mediocre tennis ability, I would probably not have done so. That, as it turned out, was a case of very bad judgment.

The upshot was that the play Larry Noto produced, "The Fantastiks," became the most successful and longest running off-Broadway play in history. Although its first performance was in the late 1950s, it is still being shown in many parts of the United States and around the world. "Great shot, Larry!"

* * *

When Sunset's management cut our commissions and staffed the store with more salesmen, which resulted in a sizable reduction of my income, I left and took a job with another appliance store in Mount Vernon, New York where I soon became its top salesman. While that was partially due to the extensive knowledge I had acquired in this field, there were also some other related factors. One was that I was not intimidated by our competitors. Instead of sifting through the morning newspaper ads and moaning about the low prices from such Manhattan discount houses as Masters and Corvettes, as most of my colleagues habitually did, I spent my time planning how I could sell what we had in our inventory.

Another contributing factor was the matter of service. When some of my colleagues mysteriously disappeared whenever one of their customers came to complain about a problem, I often stepped in and took care of them. Although I only did so because I thought that we owed them this courtesy and expected no monetary gain, it proved to be surprisingly rewarding. When the people I had helped needed another appliance, they came back and bought it from me, as also did other members of their family and friends.

Before I could reap the full benefits of my labor, I had to overcome a problem known as the "Swede." Being so called because of his Swedish name and ancestors, the "Swede," who was also the sales manager, dealt himself into every sale we made. He took an unofficial 10 percent cut from the commissions earned by the salesmen. Since this had been going on for a long time in this store and they feared for their jobs, the salesmen just kept on paying and never complained about it. At least not to the Swede. However, when they grumbled to me about it and I suggested that we stop the payola to the Swede, they were in favor of it. But only if I would be the first to do so, which is precisely what I did when the next pay day came around.

When the Swede, a short and chubby man with blond hair and blue eyes approached me and said, "Hey, where is my cut?"

I replied resolutely, "You won't get one from me."

"Oh yeah?" said the Swede, while the smile faded from his round face, "You probably don't know what will happen if you don't."

"What are you going to do about it?" I challenged him.

"If you don't pay me, I will start taking some of the customers you would normally have. So think about that," threatened the

Swede.

"I don't care about that," I replied. "As you know, we have an 'up-system' where everybody gets an even chance to make a sale."

"Yeah, but when I start selling you will make less money," said the Swede.

"Perhaps so," I replied, "but regardless of the consequences, I will no longer give you a cut of my earnings."

When the other salesmen heard what I had done, they also stopped the payola to the Swede. Although he made some efforts to sell, the Swede, who was much too lazy to compete with us on the sales floor, quickly gave up on that and confined himself to do his managing job.

Now that I made more money than I had earned before, the living standard of my family, which had meanwhile grown with the arrival of our daughter, Janet, in July of 1959, improved accordingly. However, looking ahead, as I began to do since I had a family and responsibilities, and seeing no future with the company I worked for, I began to search for another job with a better opportunity for advancement. I eventually found one in the fall of 1959 with Grandway, the discount store division of the Grand Union Company.

Following several interviews with the personnel manager and tests, which included such unrelated questions as "how many apples in a bushel," I was hired as an appliance manager. They sent me to take care of their first and oldest Grandway store in Keansburg, New Jersey, which was in dire need of professional help. After I traveled for several months to my new and far-away job, we moved to a closer location in Bloomfield, New Jersey. When that required a new drivers license, I went to the motor vehicles bureau where I got a memorable lesson about the law.

"Have you read the drivers book?" inquired the officer.

"No, but that should not be a problem," I replied. I will use common sense instead."

When the officer said admonishingly, "Young man, we don't go by common sense here. We go by the law," I thought he was joking. That was regrettably not the case, however, as I failed to pass the written test whose required answers had indeed little to do with common sense, and I had to do it over again.

I was at the Keansburg store less than one year when I was transferred to manage the appliance and camera departments of the

newest and largest Grandway discount store, in Albany, New York, which opened in the fall of 1960s. Besides an increase in pay and a step-up from my previous job, it also resulted in a substantial improvement for my family, who soon followed me there and moved into a more spacious and attractive garden apartment.

After being in Albany for about a year and a half, I was approached by Jim Poulos, the Grand Union vice president, who told me that he was going to Florida to take care of their troubled operation. He asked me to come along. With all going rather well for us, and the fact that my wife and children were very happy and had made friends in Albany, I did not jump immediately at this opportunity offered to me. However, when Poulos also said that I would receive an increase in pay and be in charge of all appliance and camera departments in the ten Florida Grandway stores, and I discussed the situation with Sidonie, we decided to go ahead and make the move.

* * *

It was a hot and muggy day in August of 1962, when we got into our American Motors car I had meanwhile purchased and started on our way toward Florida. The trip was rather uneventful until we arrived in Florida, the Sunshine State. When I saw the palms sway in the breeze against a background of the bluest sky I had ever seen, which seemed almost unreal and in glorious Technicolor, and we drove along the sandy shores at Daytona Beach, where we stayed for the night, I was so captivated by Florida's sub-tropical beauty that I said to Sidonie, "This is Paradise. I don't ever want to leave this place."

As it turned out, the so-called "troubled operations" proved to be a gross understatement when I visited the Florida stores. The appliance departments and their profoundly unmotivated personnel were in deplorable condition. However, with much work and seemingly endless hours, I was able to turn them into efficient running operations within about half the time projected for it.

When that required drastic measures to rid the stores of the "dead wood," and I refused to accept unsuitable and overpriced merchandise from our New Jersey headquarters, whose buyers were either incompetent, "on the take," or both, and I negotiated much more favorable deals for the Florida stores from our suppliers than they did, I also made some enemies and became known as a

"Maverick." But that didn't bother me.

Being a "straight shooter" with a distinct disdain for corporate politics, I just did what needed to be done. Since the Florida departments I was in charge of consistently out-performed those in the north, and our vice president approved of my job, I was shielded from the persistent flak directed at me from the jealous buyers at our headquarters.

With my promotion and commensurate increase in pay, we were soon able to realize the American dream. We bought a small house in North Miami Beach and added an adorable Persian kitten and a beagle pup to our family. With Sidonie and our children soon able to make friends in our area, and all else going rather well for the Gruenberg family, we were very happy there.

That lasted until 1966, when I became disenchanted with the never ending corporate politics at Grandway and began to look for other opportunities. I thought to have found it when I bought the first compact refrigerator. Although it was only one small five cubic foot model, I envisioned many other possibilities, including different sizes, types and applications. I also thought that this might be a chance to carve out a small niche for myself in the huge appliance market. Since that would require a lot of money, which I didn't have, I talked to one of our suppliers about it whose family were importers of electronic goods from Japan. When they agreed to provide the necessary credit and offered me a good salary and shares in the new business, I accepted and left Grandway.

While that seemed like another step in the right direction, it didn't turn out that way. At least not at first, as I made a critical error in my judgment of the people I got involved with.

* * *

Since compact refrigerators were not made in America, I went to Italy where such small models were the norm rather than the exception and produced in large quantities. After I contacted one of the major manufacturers located near Venice, and obtained an exclusive contract from them, I came back to Florida and began to work on the distribution.

When the business began to take off, with the addition of a sales team and several new products I developed with our suppliers, my predatory partners, who had the majority of shares, suddenly, and without any prior discussions, decided to exclude me from the

business I had built. When they also refused to pay for the shares I owned in the company, it resulted in a protracted law suit, purposely dragged out by them to prevent me from competing, until they finally settled the case out of court.

Although left with only a modest sum of money after lawyers fees, a family to take care of and monthly mortgage payments, I decided not to look for another job, but rather start my own import business. When Sidonie, who was very worried about our situation, asked during one of our evening walks, how I could possibly do it without sufficient money, and I said, "Don't worry. It will all work out," I really meant it, as I never felt more confident as I did then that I could pull it off.

Chapter 18

When I arrived at the international merchandise fair in Milan, Italy, in April of 1968, with much hope but very little money, I had neither the contacts, as the manufacturer I had previously dealt with was under contract with the firm I had just left; nor the financial means to start a business.

However, imbued with a contagious spirit, an innate ability to communicate and extensive product and market knowledge, I was eventually able to find a small manufacturer near Milan who was willing to work with me. After we concluded a verbal agreement, sealed only by a hand-shake, which was then as good as a bond and would become a standard procedure for most of my future dealings, I came back home and went to work.

My first move was to obtain financing to open a letter of credit for the initial quantity of compact refrigerators I had committed to. When I went to a few commercial Banks in Miami, I had a rude awakening. Having apparently insufficient assets to warrant a loan or credit, I learned, to my surprise, that "banks prefer not to lend money to people who don't have it, but rather to those who do," a paradoxical practice still in existence today.

It was then that a banker I had met at a Rotary Club meeting came to my rescue. When I talked to him about it and he saw my financial statement, he said, "Morris, I can't take that to the loan committee. They won't approve it. However, I am authorized to extend a credit line up to \$20,000 without submitting it to them. Since you are so enthusiastic about this business and seem to know what you are doing, I am going to give it you."

With that, and the money I still had, I was now ready to make my next move. Instead of selling to individual appliance stores, as I had previously done while at the former firm, I thought it would be better to find distributors for the compact refrigerators that would soon be made for me.

When I went on a trip to visit prospective buyers, located in

various states, I had no idea what I was facing. Although I traveled economically, lived on a shoe-string budget, stayed in cheap motels and ate at inexpensive hamburger shops and diners, my sales were so meager that they didn't even cover my modest expenses. Most of the prospective buyers I visited just shook their head and evinced no interest when they learned that the compact refrigerators were made in Italy, a country known to them mainly as producers of pasta, wine, cheese and olive oil. My most memorable encounter was with my last appointment, an RCA-Whirlpool distributor in San Antonio, Texas.

I had barely settled into the chair of his nicely air-conditioned office, which was a welcome relief on this very hot summer day, when the general manager, clad in riding boots and a cowboy hat, fixed his eyes on mine and said, in his Texan drawl, "Young man. Before you tell me what you have, I want you to know that we have been in business for nearly one hundred years and that we buy only from well established companies. Now, tell me, how long have you been in business?"

Put off by his arrogance, and the fact that I had been in business less than thirty days, and thus had zero chances to sell him anything, I closed my open product folder and replied, "Not long enough to do business with you. However, I may contact you again after my company's first centennial." With that I got up and walked out.

The upshot was that the very same person sent a letter to my company a few years later, in which he inquired how his firm could become a distributor of our products. Although tempted to reply that we only do business with companies older than one hundred and twenty years, thus raising the requirement past his firm's existence, I thought it wiser not to and just ignored it.

Since my efforts to find distributors bore no fruit, I decided to approach large retail stores instead and got a fairly substantial order from Jeffersons, a major appliance dealer in South Florida. Just when I thought that things were beginning to improve, disaster struck in the form of a strike by the dock worker's union, that closed all American seaports. Unable to import any goods, I was, for all practical purposes, out of business.

To earn some money, I contacted a New York transshipper and began to sell appliances and electronics, like GE, RCA, and other major brands. My customers were the Jeffersons stores and a few

other retailers, who were unable to obtain them from local distributors, as these products were then price-controlled and not available to discounters. With that I was able to stay afloat until the long-lasting strike ended and the ports reopened. When I was finally able to make the first shipment to Jeffersons, whose buyer had patiently waited for it, another disaster struck.

I was at home, from where I ran my business at first, when I got a phone call from the Jeffersons' buyer, who informed me that he could not use the refrigerators I had shipped to him. When I inquired what the problem was, he told me that they were all equipped with 220 Volt compressors, instead of 115 Volt as used in the US.

Fortunately, I was dealing with a responsible manufacturer. Realizing that they had made an error, the Italian firm dispatched a shipment of correct compressors via air freight, as well as two mechanics from the factory who made the conversions. With that, and the cooperation of the Jeffersons buyer, with whom I developed an amicable relationship, I was able to survive that near disaster.

My efforts to sell my refrigerators to other large appliance dealers, like Jeffersons, remained unsuccessful, however, until I contacted Romie Thomas, whom I had met at several product shows while I was still with Grandway. When I told him about my products, and that I had a good deal for him, Romie, whose family owned McDuff's, the largest appliance retailer in northern Florida, suggested that we meet at the Doral Country Club in Miami, where he would be in a few days.

At first, the hotel operator couldn't find Romie, who was not in his room when I arrived. When she eventually located him, Romie, who came to the lobby to greet me, said, "I am in a meeting with a bunch of business associates. Come with me. I will introduce you to them."

When I followed Romie into a smoke-filled room, I came upon a dozen or more men who were seated around a long conference table. As I soon learned, they were the owners of very large discount houses and appliance store chains in the country. Having formed a buying cooperative to pool their purchasing power, they were also known in the industry as "The Forty Thieves."

I don't know who had coined that name, but it proved to be a gross misnomer. While they were indeed some of the most astute merchants I would meet during my business career, they were also

very honorable and responsible people.

After Romie introduced me to his associates and announced that I might have a good deal for them, he turned to me and said, "Go ahead, Morris. Tell us about it."

Although totally unprepared and awed by the presence of so many experts and buying power, I was somehow able to improvise a quick presentation. After a short resume about myself and the products I presently had, I outlined my plans for new models and my vision for the near future. The proposal I made to them was straight forward and simple. I would deliver good quality products at the lowest prices in the industry and give them an exclusive in their trading area, providing that they buy in container quantities and I could ship directly from the factory to their warehouses.

That was followed by numerous questions and answers. The last one came from one of the owners of Lechemere's discount stores in Boston, Mass., "How do we know that we can trust you?"

When I replied, "You won't know until you deal with me," the members of the group thanked me for the presentation and I left.

When time passed and I didn't hear from Romie or anyone else about this matter, my hope of success began to wane. I had almost written it off as a failure, when I got a telephone call from the spokesman of the buying group. When he told me that they were ready to do business with me, I was elated. Besides affirming the importance of being "at the right place at the right time," it also proved to be the turning point of my fledgling business career.

Unlike my previous trip, the next one, during which I visited each member of the buying group, was successful beyond my expectations. So much, in fact, that the orders I received from them exceeded by far the production capacity of the Italian manufacturer, as well as my anemic credit line. To overcome the latter, I asked the buying group to open letters of credit to me, which, in turn, were backed-up by the bank I dealt with.

Armed with ample credit I went again to Italy, where I made contact with several other manufacturers who were willing to work with me and make some of the special models I had envisioned. From that point on my business took a meteoric rise. Sales increased dramatically and so did my credit line with the bank.

* * *

Similar to Joseph's interpretation of Pharaoh's dream, about the

seven fat cows and the seven meager ones, the first seven years were indeed the "abundant" ones for us. We bought a new house on a lake in a nice section of North Miami Beach, joined a nearby club and lived very well.

Having set up my now flourishing business very compact and efficiently, I ran it from a small office nearby, with the assistance of two secretaries. Although it required extensive traveling to my European suppliers and accounts in the United States, I didn't mind, as most were located in interesting areas and pleasant to deal with.

To cope with the expanding demand for my products, I began to buy refrigerators also from Spanish manufacturers. One of those was located in Alcala de Henares, near Spain's capital city, Madrid. Since I had been referred to them by their Italian affiliate, Zanussi, I was cordially received.

When the general manager invited me for dinner and we arrived at the restaurant, I could hardly believe my eyes, as it was the famous and very exclusive Horchert Restaurant once located in Berlin. Having been a frequent hangout for Nazi Party bigwigs, they had found a safe haven in Franco's Fascist Spain, as also did many of their former Nazi guests.

The general manager of the factory was of German origin. When I asked where he had been during the war, he told me that he and his brother, while on a visit to German relatives, had been drafted and served in the German *Wehrmacht*. Although a conceivable story, I questioned its veracity.

What I did learn from him was, that he apparently came from an influential German family in Spain through which he had obtained his important position. So also did his brother who was the general manager of the plush Ritz Hotel in Madrid, the very one they had checked me into. Being located across from the Museo del Prado, the museum that housed some of the most famous paintings by such masters as Velasquez, Goya, El Greco and other artists, I became a frequent visitor there.

The other Spanish Factory I dealt with had their business office in San Sebastian, a beautiful and picturesque port city on the Bay of Biscay, located in the northern Basque area. Besides being a popular vacation spot for many northern Europeans, it was also for the Spanish dictator, Generalissimo Franco, whose glistening white yacht was anchored off-shore. However, I never met an American there, until one day in September of 1970.

While having a cup of coffee in the deserted lounge of the elegant Monte Igueldo Hotel, situated on top of a mountain with the same name, with a wonderful scenic view of San Sebastian and its bay, I pondered what to do on this last day before my departure. Should I take a last long stroll through the streets of the city and its colorful water front where the fishing boats were anchored, and then go to the Aita Mare restaurant again for some more of its delicious seafood? Or should I just take it easy and stay in the hotel? Having opted for the former, I was about to leave when a group of men suddenly entered the lobby, who turned out to be Americans.

Since their appearance was that of highly spirited and well-educated men in their mid-thirties, I thought that it might be an ivy league school reunion or a convention of financial consultants perhaps. After I introduced myself as a fellow American to one of the men, whose name was Dick Squires, I asked what they were doing there. To my surprise, Squires told me that they were all playing members of the United States Fronton Team who had come to San Sebastian to participate in the world's championship.

When I questioned him about the rather advanced age of his team members for such a competitive sport and how they had been selected, Squires told me, quite humorously, that they were the best of the few men who played this rather obscure sport in America. Moreover, they had also represented the United States at the Olympic games in Mexico City.

He also told me of a shocking incident he had witnessed the night before. It happened during the opening ceremony and in the presence of Generalissimo Franco, when a Basque opponent of the Franco regime set himself on fire and jumped down from the upper gallery.

Our conversation ended rather abruptly when a young Spanish woman entered the lounge, who was apparently a representative of the local sports federation, and who became the immediate focus of the American team members.

Since I left San Sebastian on the very next morning, I could not attend the games and cheer for the American team. While that was the end of this episode, it was not my last contact with the highly spirited and very talented Dick Squires.

Having always played tennis and been a member of the USTA, the United States Tennis Association, I also received their monthly magazine. While reading

an article in a vastly improved 1991 issue, I noticed that the editor's name was Dick Squires. While I never forget a face, it is not always the case with names, unless the person or the episode left a memorable impression on me. Wondering whether he may be the same person I had briefly met in San Sebastian, I wrote to him.

As it turned out, it was indeed the very same Dick Squires who also sent me his well-written book "The Other Racquet Sports." When Squires inquired about my past and I told him how I came to play tennis, he wrote an article about me in the October 1991 issue of "Tennis USTA," titled "An 'Average' Man's Odyssey."

Although we never met again personally, I stayed in touch via telephone and letters with Dick Squires, who has also been very helpful with my work on this book and the previous one.

The good years came to an end when the so-called "police action" in Vietnam was financed by the U.S. government by merely printing more paper money. That, in turn, greatly devalued the former almighty dollar. While my business with the Spanish factories lasted somewhat longer than with my Italian suppliers, the tide of the rapidly rising inflation caught up with me there also.

Just when I was running out of suppliers, I met a Polish manufacturer of refrigerators at the international trade fair at Cologne, Germany in the mid-1970s. Although they had only one model of interest at that time, I saw possibilities for other products and made an appointment to meet with them again at the next trade fair in Poznan, Poland. That came about just one day before I hastily left Germany,

This was, in fact, my very first visit to the country of my birth since I left it in December of 1949, as I had no desire to go back to Germany. However, since the European appliance industry I was dealing with exhibited at the Cologne fair, and I was looking for new suppliers, I decided to attend. Having been unable to find suitable lodging in the crowded city of Cologne during the fair, I stayed instead at the large and modern Inter-Continental Hotel in the nearby city of Düsseldorf.

It was late at night and I was asleep, when I suddenly heard many voices singing the Horst Wessel march, the German Nazis' national anthem. At first I thought I was dreaming. But when the singing continued and I sat up and listen to the lyrics, which I still remembered all too well, I realized that it was real and not just one of my recurring nightmares.

I quickly got dressed and went downstairs. When I questioned the night concierge about this disturbing incident, he said, "Oh, this

is just a reunion of some former army soldiers."

"Come on," I said, "former soldiers of the *Wehrmacht*, the German army, wouldn't sing the Horst Wessel song. Who are these people?"

"I am sorry about the inconvenience," said the polite, but also evasive concierge. "Had you been on one of the higher floors, you wouldn't have been disturbed by the noise."

"This is not what I asked," I said. "What I want to know is who these people are?"

"I told you already," replied the concierge who began to get a little piqued about my questioning, "they are just old *Kameraden*, comrades from the war."

"What kind of *Kameraden* are they and which units did they serve in?" I inquired.

"From the *Waffen SS*," said the reluctant concierge after some hesitation.

"The *Waffen SS*? Are you telling me that the *Waffen SS* is having a reunion here in your hotel?" I queried.

"Yes," confirmed the concierge who began to shed his politeness and glared at me. "There is no law against that."

"Does that apply to the fact that they can also sing that damn Nazi song again?" I inquired.

"I am not sure about that," said the concierge who reversed his former confrontational stance and tried to be a bit more amicable.

"But you know how it is when old comrades get together and have a few drinks. They don't mean anything by it."

"Oh, they don't?" I thought. "Whom was he telling these fairy tales to?"

Having participated in the mass execution of hundreds of thousands of defenseless Jewish men, women and children, as well as many other persons in the occupied East-European countries, the voluntary members of the *Waffen SS* had also been in charge of the concentration camps where millions of people perished. Considering the atrocities committed by the *Waffen SS*, most of their members were, in fact, nothing else but a bunch of cowardly mass-murderers.

My view does apparently not conform with that of the German government, which still pays a generous pension to former members of the *Waffen SS* and their families for services performed for the fatherland. That includes those of the Latvian SS, a country in which most of the Jewish population was murdered with the help of Latvian collaborators, while surviving victims of the Holocaust in the East-European countries either got nothing or a pittance for their suffering

and loss of their families and possessions.

Upset about this incident and having no intentions to stay any longer in Germany, I quickly changed my flight reservation and went back home.

Chapter 19

My first trip to Poland was a surprising and educational one. When I arrived in Warsaw, I was beset by an eerie feeling, as if I had traveled back in time to the post-war period in Germany of 1945-1948. Besides being a bleak and neglected looking city, like East-Berlin, I soon learned that most everything one wanted to obtain or accomplish in Poland could only be done with hard currencies or equivalent scarce commodities.

I had barely settled in the taxi cab at the airport, that was to take me to the hotel, when the driver offered to exchange some of my American dollars for Polish zlotys at a considerable multiple of the official rate. When I wanted to check in at the Forum hotel in Warsaw and the clerk at the reception claimed that she couldn't find my reservation, she quickly did so when I slipped a few dollars into my passport and handed it to her.

While making the rounds in the hotel lobby, I discovered a shop in which one could buy rare imported luxuries. However, these were available only for hard currencies, which the ordinary Polish people didn't have.

Having lived in a similar dismal environment for several post-war years, it didn't take long for me to realize that most everything of importance in Poland ran on *bakshish*, bribes. When I met with the government officials of the Polish Trade Agency at their headquarters in Warsaw, and subsequently at the Poznan trade fair, I was well prepared.

Although these meetings took place in the early morning, they were frequently interrupted by toasts with the ever present vodka. After I presented desirable western rarities, such as fine Napoleon cognac and American cigarettes to the men, and French perfumes and Swiss chocolates to the women, the deal was made and I began to import refrigerators from Poland.

At first I sold large quantities of these small, Polish made refrigerators to my customers, and all went well for a while. But

when sales began to slow down and I got very few reorders, I realized that I had a problem.

While the costs of the products and the import tax was low, as Poland was one of very few eastern Communist countries with whom the United States had a favorable trade agreement, the refrigerators, being of the absorption type (without compressors), were not very efficient nor popular in the U.S. market. Since the Polish factory, located in Wroclaw, the former German town of Breslau, had no access to 115 volt compressors for the U.S. market, I came up with an idea which, I thought, might solve this problem.

I had learned that Fiat, the Italian automobile giant who also manufactured cars in Poland, did not get paid in hard currency. Instead, Fiat had to take Polish-made goods in a barter deal, which did not cover Poland's outstanding debt with them. With that in mind I went to Fiat's headquarters in Turin, Italy, where I met with their export manager, a rather young and well dressed man from Trieste, to whom I proposed the following deal.

If they supplied the Polish factory with 115 volt compressors, made by Aspera Frigo, a firm also located in Turin, in which Fiat had a financial interest, and have the Polish manufacturer make refrigerators for me, I would buy them directly from Fiat and pay with American dollars.

To my surprise, and contrary to common practices of corporate giants, such as Fiat, where the process of decisions can take months, I got a definitive answer on the very next evening. That came about when I met with the export manager, who had invited me for dinner at the *Gatto Nero*, the Black Cat, one of Turin's finest restaurants. While feasting on a delicious meal and superb Piemonte wine, we discussed all details and agreed to go ahead with it.

My well-intended plan came to naught, however. Although it would have been of benefit to all parties, the boss of the Polish trade agency in Warsaw, a highly ranked Communist party member, whose envy and hostile posture toward western capitalists was matched only by his lack of commercial intelligence, refused to go along with the deal.

His refusal to cooperate and animosity toward me may have been caused by my inquiry during one of our informal discussions. When I asked him how the Polish media dealt with the "Katyn" incident, in which the Soviets executed thousands of disarmed Polish military officers, members of the clergy and intelligencia,

and buried them in mass graves in the forest of Katyn, it evoked a violent outburst from him. That, for all intent and purposes, ended my Polish business venture.

* * *

To search for new products that I could sell in America and possibly abroad, I went to the 1977 consumer electronic show in Las Vegas with one of my sales agents. While walking through the aisles and viewing many displays, we came upon a booth, attended by two casually dressed young men, who exhibited a strange looking box, called an "Apple" computer. When I asked one of the men, whose name turned out to be Steven Jobs, what this rather expensive new gadget could do, and he explained, among other things, that "your wife could put all of her recipes in it," I wasn't impressed by it and we left.

When my companion inquired, "What do you think of this new product, Morris?" I shook my head and made the profoundly inane statement, "Who, in hell, needs a computer in his home?" So much for my prophetic abilities.

After a relatively short venture of manufacturing projection television and exporting American optical products to Europe, I decided to close my business. Now that our son, Gary, had graduated from college and no longer lived at home, and our daughter, Janet, was away, studying at the University of Denver, Colorado, Sidonie and I decided to change our life-style and leave the overcrowded and crime-ridden city of Miami. Being avid skiers and enamored with the quaint resorts in the European Alps, we began to look for similar areas in the United States, which eventually turned out to be in the Rocky Mountains of Northwest-Montana.

That would most likely not have happened, had it not been for Jack Ryan. The story about this episode actually began in early January of 1979, while we were at the ski resort of Keystone, Colorado with our daughter, Janet, during one of her school breaks.

* * *

Although I suffered from a severe fear-of-heights syndrome that bordered on sheer panic at times, I was able to handle the lofty altitudes quite well as long as I had my feet on the ground. However, when I went up the Keystone mountain with one of the

chair lifts that lacked a cross-bar for protection, I decided I had enough of it. I skied down the slope, handed my brand-new skis to my daughter and took up cross-country skiing instead.

After our daughter left for her school in Denver, we drove to Aspen, Colorado. While Sidonie went down-hill skiing, I went to the nearby Ashcroft mountain which turned out to be a cross-country skiers paradise.

Besides having a beautiful panorama and well groomed trails that criss-crossed the natural unspoiled Alpine forest, including a small brook, one could stop for a short respite at one of the quaint looking warming huts along the way, which were stocked with gratuitous hot drinks, candies and nuts. It was in one of these huts where I met Jack Ryan.

I had actually noticed him before while we passed and politely greeted each other on the trails. But it never went beyond that until we met in the warming hut. After a short rest and conversation, we agreed to meet again for lunch at the rustic looking restaurant half-way up the Ashcroft mountain.

Known as "The Cook House," it turned into a delightful culinary experience for me. The cook, a young Hungarian woman who was married to the caretaker of the trails, prepared delicious tasting dishes for the hungry skiers, including hot and spicy Goulash and fine pastries. That is where I learned that the white-haired, tall and spirited Jack Ryan, who was respectfully addressed by all as, "Mister Ryan," was actually one of the original founders of the Aspen ski resort.

It was in the late 1930's when the young Jack Ryan and a few equally young friends, the sons of wealthy families, who shared his love for skiing, decided to build a ski resort in Aspen. The project came to a halt, however, when the war in Europe broke out in September of 1939, and two of Ryan's young partners decided to join the RAF, the British Royal Air Force, in their fight against Nazi Germany. One of the two young men died in the war when his plane was shot down. When the United States entered the war in 1941, the patriotic Ryan and his remaining partners donated the steel they had acquired for their project to the U.S. government, and volunteered to join the army.

Based on his skiing skills and other qualifications, the young Jack Ryan was assigned to the U.S. 10th Mountain Division. After military training in Colorado, during which they honed their skills

in skiing and mountain climbing, the 10th Mountain Division was sent to Italy in 1944, where they fought against the Germans. While attacking a formerly unassailable mountain top position held by the Germans, Ryan was injured. Later transferred to the Special Forces, Ryan served under the command of "Wild" Bill Donovan of the OSS, the forerunner of the CIA, and participated in daring raids behind enemy lines.

When the war ended and Ryan returned, he and his surviving friends gave up the Aspen ski resort project and sold their interest and holdings to another group who proceeded with it. That did not include the nearby Ashcroft mountain, however, owned by Ryan. Having originally been planned for down-hill skiing, Ryan developed it into a cross-country skiers paradise instead. Although he and his wife owned a house in Aspen, Ryan, who loved this marvelous mountain and its beautiful scenery, and who skied there most of the day, often stayed over-night in one of the warming huts.

Being in his sixties and suffering from cancer, Ryan confided in me that he was about to sell the Ashcroft mountain to the U.S. government for one million dollars. Although substantially below its actual market value, he had offered Ashcroft at that price, providing that it would remain a public domain and in its natural condition, which the government had agreed to. My puzzlement why he didn't leave it to his children was soon solved, when Ryan explained that they might be tempted by offers from commercial developers and sell it to them.

"I want Ashcroft mountain to remain the way it is now and for the public to enjoy," said Ryan. When he mentioned also that one of his stipulations was that no other structures could be built on the mountain, and I inquired about an existing home I had seen at its foothills, Ryan told me that this was the only one of its kind and the reason for it.

The man who lived in this house with his wife and two sons, one of whom was the caretaker of the trails, was a former U.S. soldier and decorated hero who had risked his life many times to rescue shot-down pilots in remote and inaccessible areas during the war. When the war ended and Ryan learned about his heroic deeds, he built a home for him and told him that he could live there rent-free for the rest of his life. That is the kind of person Jack Ryan was. A remarkable, spirited and generous man with all the attributes I admire in a person.

When Ryan, with whom I developed an amicable relationship during my short visit to Ashcroft, learned that we were planning to move into a somewhat similar area in Colorado, but not quite as expensive as Aspen, he said, "Why don't you take a look at Montana?"

Knowing nothing about Montana, except for its rather remote geographic location, I queried, "Why Montana?"

"Because Montana is today what Colorado was about fifty years ago," said Ryan. He also told me that one of the Austrian developers and ski instructors in Aspen had moved there.

That is how we eventually wound up living in the serene and beautiful area of Northwest-Montana, with a view of the Mission mountain range and Flathead Lake, the largest fresh water lake west of the Mississippi.

We shared our residence with native Indians, bald eagles who nested near our chalet-type home, with deer that grazed on our land, a few bears and a multitude of other wildlife. While the summer and fall in that area is absolutely glorious, the winter with its mainly overcast and dreary sky is much less so and can be the acid test of a marriage.

After our first grandchild arrived, we bought another home in Florida to be near our daughter's and son's family who also live there. After many years of being in Florida for the winter months and in Montana for the summer, Florida is now our permanent residence.

When our friends and acquaintances in Miami learned of our plans to move to Montana, who were absolutely baffled by it, a rumor began to circulate that I was a CIA agent. I am not sure how they arrived at that erroneous conclusion. I suspect, however, that it may have been caused by the fact that I rarely discussed my business activities with them, which was unusual in their circles and aroused suspicion. Having apparently misinterpreted my desire for privacy as being enigmatic and of anti-social behavior, they surmised that I had something to hide and was, in fact, a CIA agent.

Another contributing factor may have been a TV program aired at that time, in which former CIA agents, after retiring from their clandestine work, moved to remote area of Montana. Although not applicable to me and totally unfounded, the rumor continued to persist for some time.

The strange thing was that they were not alone in their erroneous

assumption. Had they learned of an episode that took place in 1977, it would have confirmed their suspicion.

* * *

When I informed the Polish trading company that I would no longer buy products from them, they sent two delegates to Miami, who tried to dissuade me from doing so. The pair, a man and a woman I had never met before, barely left my office without success, as I had no intentions to continue doing business with them, when my secretary, who looked very disturbed, came into my office. She told me that there was another man outside who wanted to speak with me.

Having made no other appointments with anyone and in a hurry to go somewhere else, I said to her, "I can't see him right now. Please find out what he wants and tell him to come back some other time."

"I don't think we can do that," said my secretary.

"Why not?" I inquired.

"Because he is from the FBI and wants to see you right now," she replied.

As it turned out, the man who entered my office and identified himself, was indeed an FBI agent. When I inquired why he wanted to see me, he told me that the Polish female visitor, who had just left, was known as a spy to the FBI. He also revealed that she had been in the United States under the cover of an official Polish representative before, and that he had followed her from the Miami airport, which led him to me.

After he inquired about the reason of their visit, and I informed him about my business dealings with Poland and the gist of our conversation, the FBI agent said, "You are probably working with the CIA, don't you?" Without awaiting my answer, he continued, "Please call me if they come back for another meeting with you." Having said that, he handed me his agency's card and left.

Although perplexed about his assumption and at a loss to understand how he arrived at his erroneous conclusion, I thought it was rather amusing and almost forgot about it until the rumor began to circulate among our friends that I was a CIA agent.

The truth is that I am not nearly as enigmatic as it may appear. The question, who the "real" Morris Gruenberg is, has never been a secret - at least not to my family and to those who really know me.

" While I am no longer the zealous idealist of my youth, the fervent defender of all the oppressed and resolute nonconformist, the defiant, savvy, and often daring survivor of the Nazi era, or the disillusioned and somewhat bitter realist of the postwar years, I have retained some of all these characteristics and am now the total sum of it. "

Aftermath

Drews, Kurt. My former colleague at the Berliner police department. After many years of service as a detective, Drews, who attained an important position with the Berliner criminal police, retired from his profession in 1983.

Gänge, Dyonis. After he quit his job as a police detective and became a salesman for a firm in West-Berlin, Dyonis ran afoul with the law in the 1960's and fled to East-Germany. When the East-German Communist regime fell and the wall came down, I suddenly received a letter from him. Although I answered his letter forthwith, I never heard from Dyonis again. I have meanwhile learned from Kurt Drews, with whom I have stayed in touch through the years, that Dyonis was very ill and may have passed away.

Gruenberg, Rosa. My mother was arrested by the Gestapo during the "Factory Action," on the 27th of February 1943. After being held at the detention camp in the Grosse Hamburgerstrasse, she was deported to Auschwitz. According to copies of documents obtained from the Landes Archiv Berlin, which came from the offices of the former president of the German Finance department, who were the recipients of all confiscated Jewish possessions, Rosa Gruenberg's name and number 1348 appear on page 70 of the transport list. After they assigned the prisoners number V/845 to her, my mother was sent on March 2, 1943, with the 32nd East transport to the Auschwitz death camp where she perished.

Maier, Karl-Heinz. According to his two autobiographical books, Maier had an illustrious and interesting career. He served for a short time as a soldier in the German *Wehrmacht* on the Russian front in 1941, but was kicked out of the army when they discovered that he was the child of a German mother and Jewish father. As to his supposed clandestine existence thereafter, I have heard conflicting stories about him and his activities.

After he left his job with the Berliner police department, Maier fought as a German volunteer with the Israeli army against the Arab aggressors in 1948, and remained in Israel until 1952. When he returned to Germany, Maier, who took a job as a Journalist, became the correspondent for a West-German newspapers in Berlin.

From 1968 to 1988, Maier managed the radio studio of the "Deutsche Welle." He was also a founding member of the "Berliner Presse Konferenz," which is the German equivalent of the American Press Club in Washington, D.C., where Maier became its main speaker and representative. It was during this time that Maier, who was honored by various governments with medals and titles, met and mingled with some of the most distinguished and influential political personalities of the Western world. After he retired, Maier wrote two books which were essentially autobiographic.

* * *

What he didn't tell, and nobody else knew, except perhaps for his wife Brigitte who died shortly before he did, was that behind all this glory lurked a very dark side of Karl-Heinz Maier. That became known only after Maier passed away on January 14, 1996. It was then that the German police released information to the press, that an investigations of the highly-thought-of Maier had been going on for some time and that he may, in fact, have been one of the top agents for the STASI, the notorious intelligence service of the East-German Communist government. That was based on the fact that incriminating evidence against him had been found in the files of the STASI, after the fall of the Communist regime and that of the Berliner dividing wall.

Since Maier, a former colleague of mine at Berlin's police headquarters, had also betrayed me to a Russian gangster and thus knowingly put my life at risk, I was not nearly as surprised by the revelations about him, as were some of his former colleagues and friends.

Villa, Percy continued to send me reports about his life and newspaper clips for several years after I left Minneapolis. His last communication came from Las Vegas, Nevada in the late 1950s, where he had taken a job as managing editor with Hank Greenspun's Las Vegas Sun publication. However, when I visited Las Vegas in the early 1970s and called the office of the Las Vegas Sun, I got an

icy reception and no information when I inquired about Villa.

I eventually found his phone number and called him. When Villa could not recall who I was and asked instead with a suspicious sounding voice what I wanted from him, I assured him that it was only to say "hello" and wish him good health. That was my last contact with Percy Villa.

Vogel, Pepi. Like many other victims of Nazi persecution, Pepi had a tough time making a living after the war ended. While doing odd jobs to support herself, Pepi went for two years to an acting school in Berlin. She also performed in a West-Berlin cabaret and in road shows throughout Germany.

When she returned in 1951 from one of those trips to her home in Buch, located in the East-Berlin sector, Pepi was ordered to appear before an officer of the STASI, who accused her of anti-Communists activities and threatened to prosecute her. However, he offered to drop all charges against her, providing that she would spy for them and denounce some of her colleagues she was working with.

Caught in this dilemma, Pepi pretended to play along with her interrogator. She promised that she would meet with him again in two weeks, at which time she would supply him with a list of these so-called "counter-revolutionaries." Having no intentions to do so, Pepi fled to West-Berlin, where she remained to this day.

After years of a struggling acting career, Pepi got a job with the American supported Berliner radio station RIAS, an abbreviation for "*Rundfunk Im Amerikanischen Sector.*," broadcast in the American sector. While at first as a speaker for the search department, looking for missing persons, Pepi became a regular and widely-known speaker in various other programs as well. After working at this job for nearly forty years, Pepi retired from her activities in 1990.

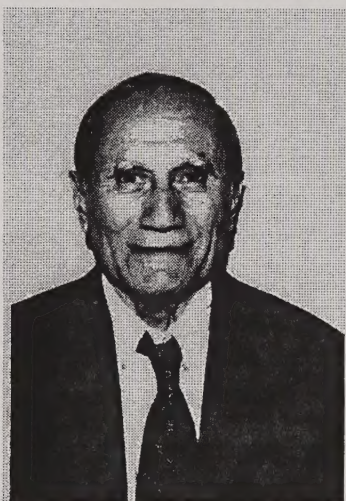
When the East-German Communist regime collapsed, Pepi was able to reclaim her rightful properties. She lives now comfortably in the city during the winter, and in her house with a nice garden in a Berliner suburb in the summer.

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All pictures and documents are the property of the author.

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About the Author



MORRIS GRUENBERG

The son of Eastern European Jewish parents, was born, raised and educated in Berlin, Germany. After graduating in 1936 from a private Jewish school, and a short employment as an apprentice in a garment firm, he lost his job when the Nazis boycotted the business and forced the Jewish owners out. When the Nazis staged the riots of the *Kristallnacht* in 1938, during which they destroyed Jewish shops and burned the synagogues, they also attacked Jewish men, women and children, including the 17 year old author, and took 30,000 German Jewish men to concentration camps, 12,000 of which were from Berlin. Inducted into forced labor and deprived of all human rights and basic necessities, including access to adequate nourishment, Morris Gruenberg worked on the railroad and various other jobs for the next four years.

While the author, being one of the last Jews in Berlin, was able to escape arrest and deportation to the death camps, by assuming the identity of a Christian, his mother was unable to do so and perished in Auschwitz. Finally liberated in 1945, Morris Gruenberg, who emigrated to the United States in 1949, now resides with his wife, Sidonie, in Florida, where also their two children and five grandchildren live.

About the Author



MOORE'S COLUMBIA

The author of *Moore's Columbia* is a native of the State of New York, and has spent much of his life in the study of the history and literature of the United States. He is a member of the American Historical Association, and has been a frequent contributor to the *American Historical Review*. His work on the history of the United States has been widely recognized, and he has received many honors and awards for his contributions to the field. He is currently a professor of history at the University of California, Berkeley.

